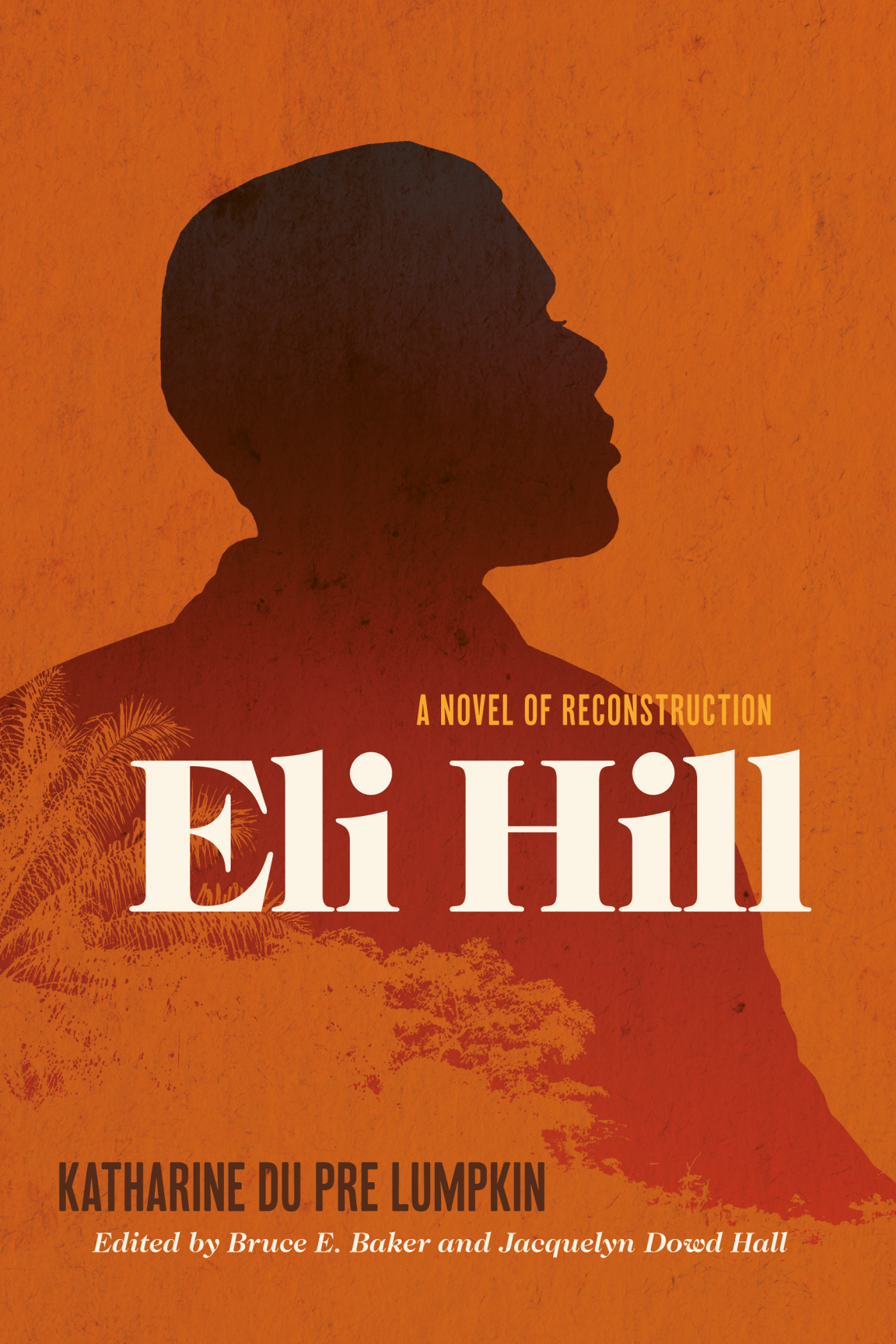




A NOVEL OF RECONSTRUCTION

Eli Hill

KATHARINE DU PRE LUMPKIN

Edited by Bruce E. Baker and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall

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Eli Hill

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A Novel of Reconstruction

Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin



EDITED AND WITH
AN INTRODUCTION BY

Bruce E. Baker and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments
vii

Introduction
ix

Note on the Text
xxxv



Eli Hill *A Novel of Reconstruction* 1

Lame Man
3

In the Wilderness
65

Lion . . . Ravenous Beast
117

A Way
199

The Hearing
215

Ransomed
231

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1951, Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin found herself resisting the suggestions offered by her editor at Houghton Mifflin, which was considering her manuscript *Eli Hill: A Novel of Reconstruction* for publication. Her story, she insisted, was “not a parallel struggle of two . . . men of good will who seek, so to speak, the same general end, a course of moderation in turbulent times, but one of fundamental conflict of aim between the two men and their two peoples.” The Civil War had ended once and for all the bondage of slavery; Reconstruction launched a “struggle . . . against the bondage of White Supremacy.” There was no “middle ground solution” to the conflict that ensued. The freedpeople would not give up “the drive to be free.” White southerners would not give up their monopoly on power. And the white North did not have the will to intervene. Therein lay the national tragedy whose intimate local and personal dimensions *Eli Hill* sought to explore.¹

Lumpkin had found the germ of her novel in the thirteen-volume report of the 1871 congressional hearings on the Ku Klux Klan.² Drawing on these haunting stories of atrocities and resistance, she planned at first to publish a series of “Tale[s] I Never Heard” aimed at conveying to a broad reading public the aspirations and human complexities of the black Reconstruction leaders who had been maligned by white historians and purveyors of popular culture as gullible or vicious buffoons.³ She was drawn especially to a local South Carolina leader named Elias Hill, one of the unlikeliest of the era’s many heroes and the victim of one of the Klan’s more repellent acts of violence. Soon her project metamorphosed into a more focused but even more challenging endeavor: a “fictional biography” that would require her to enter with imaginative sympathy into the interior life of a nineteenth-century black man and use his story as a vehicle for writing about the dynamics of black leadership and white reaction during Reconstruction.⁴

Buoyed by the success of her autobiography, *The Making of a Southerner* (1946), Lumpkin had applied for and won a coveted Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship, along with a contract from one of the country's most prestigious presses. But, three years into the project, she found herself confronting an overwhelming obstacle. Her editor did not want what she saw as a story of implacable conflict; he wanted one that would depict the difficulties of maintaining a "middle-of-the-road" position during Reconstruction. That story, if properly told, would appeal to contemporary readers, since "one of the greatest problems of our own day is just that of the intelligent moderate man trying to maintain his position."⁵

Lumpkin had begun *Eli Hill* in the spirit of the engaged literature and scholarship of the 1930s and 1940s, which took class and racial conflict as central themes. By the early 1950s, however, the country was in the grip of McCarthyism; she and her partner, Dorothy Wolff Douglas, were being targeted by red hunters; and fiction and historical writing were turning in new directions. Evaluating texts according to formal criteria and dismissing biographical, political, or historical interpretations, the New Critics relegated socially conscious fiction to the dustbin of "propaganda." At the same time, the Cold War ushered in "consensus history," a view of the American past that downplayed conflict and emphasized shared national values. Deploring extremism on both the left and the right, mainstream liberals drew on this history to enshrine the "vital center" as the American way.⁶ In the end, this new Cold War culture helped to scuttle Lumpkin's efforts to publish her historical novel. It also brought to an end a decade and a half that saw her writing works of sociology, political commentary, autobiography, and fiction, buoyed by the hope that the South's interrelated, unremitting problems might soon be resolved.

Putting *Eli Hill* in the broader context of Lumpkin's life and writings allows us to trace an arc from the historically informed reportage and sociological analysis of *The South in Progress* (1940), her first sustained study of her native region, through the blend of history and memoir in *The Making of a Southerner*, to the historical fiction of *Eli Hill*. This trilogy exemplifies the intellectual enterprise associated with what a number of historians have called the "Southern Popular Front," an interracial coalition of labor organizers, civil

rights advocates, radicals, and left liberals who saw a robust labor movement, the reenfranchisement of the black and white southern poor, and an activist regulatory and welfare state as the key to reconstructing the South and a reconstructed South as the key to extending the New Deal.⁷ While *The Making of a Southerner* has been reprinted and acknowledged as part of the quickening of the civil rights movement in the aftermath of World War II, the other two books Lumpkin wrote on related topics remain obscure. Looking at these works as parts of a continuous project suggests why *The Making of a Southerner* is the only book that Lumpkin is known for and illuminates the collapse of the Southern Popular Front in the face of domestic anticommunism and the Cold War.

Born in 1897, Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin was descended from a middling branch of one of Georgia's most prominent families. Her father, raised to expect a life spent ruling over his ancestral acres and human property in Greene County, Georgia, instead found himself eking out a living as a freight agent for the Southern Railroad in the wake of the Civil War. Transferred to Columbia, South Carolina, William W. Lumpkin devoted himself to commemorating and vindicating the Confederacy and imbuing his children with devotion to the Lost Cause. Katharine grew up in an era in which a system of class- and gender-inflected segregation fastened itself ever more firmly on southern society. All that she learned at home and in school told her that her position as a white woman made her superior to blacks and poor whites, but that power and authority would always be monopolized by white men.⁸

Her encounter with liberal Christianity eroded these inherited assumptions. Graduating from Brenau College, she worked for local YWCAs and then, like so many aspiring southern women, both black and white, headed north to New York, earning a master's degree in sociology at Columbia University in 1919 with a thesis on a subject dear to her heart: the "Social Interests of the Southern Woman."⁹ Returning to the South to lead a nascent interracial movement within the student YWCA, Lumpkin collaborated on a daily basis with young African American women whose experiences and outlook were both similar to and radically different from her own. Those friendships, and the challenges they entailed, transformed

her attitudes toward race, while her involvement with white southern industrial secretaries who were questioning the human costs of industrialization pushed her toward solutions to problems in the region that required structural change. In combination, these two separate but overlapping experiences shaped the democratic socialist, antiracist political consciousness she carried forward in the years to come.

Eager for new intellectual challenges, Lumpkin went on to the University of Wisconsin, home of the John R. Commons school of labor history and of the “Wisconsin Idea”—the notion that progressive scholarship originating in the academy could serve as a blueprint for social policy. Graduating in 1928, she secured a job at Mount Holyoke College, but she soon left to complete a book based on her dissertation, funded by a grant from the new Social Science Research Council. In 1930, she moved to Northampton, Massachusetts, where she began a long professional and personal partnership with Dorothy Wolff Douglas, a radical economist on the faculty of Smith College.¹⁰

Unable to obtain a regular faculty appointment at a time when the Depression was exacerbating women’s traditional exclusion from the academy, Lumpkin created, with Douglas’s help, an alternative institution. From 1932 to 1939, she led Smith’s Council of Industrial Studies, directing research projects, training female graduate students, and publishing scholarship that crossed disciplines and turned the tools of sociology, economics, and history to the study of regional industrial development in the Connecticut River Valley. At the same time, the two women took left-leaning stands on issues such as unemployment, social security, and the welfare of women workers. In 1936, they traveled to the Soviet Union with other Americans curious to see how communism was being implemented in that country. In 1938, they spent five months in Mexico, where President Lázaro Cárdenas was nationalizing the petroleum industry, expanding workers’ rights and social welfare provisions, and putting teeth in the agrarian reforms of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Homegrown and foreign conservatives charged Cárdenas with “lurching recklessly in the direction of Communism,” but his eclectic brand of socialism captured the imagination of southern New Dealers, who saw in Mexico’s communal system of land

redistribution a model for breaking up the plantation system and addressing the plight of sharecroppers in the South. To Lumpkin and Douglas, Cárdenas seemed to be bringing “a ‘New Deal’ to Mexico” in line with but more far-reaching than Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s.¹¹ During this same period, the two women were completing a study of child labor in the United States, the heart of which was written by Lumpkin and devoted to the centrality of child labor to southern agriculture.¹²

It was in this context that Lumpkin turned her attention back to the land of her birth. She did so at a time when many on the left were looking to the South as the crux of historical change. A massive general strike had shaken the textile industry in 1934, and in 1937 the CIO set out to organize the South. That effort was critical to the CIO’s broader project of organizing all of America’s mass production industries, because a union-free zone in the South would provide a pool of cheap, powerless workers to undermine unions across the country. Beyond the realm of industrial confrontations, New Deal politicians had gained significant power in several southern states, and some of the most daring reforms of the New Deal were being carried out in projects aimed at helping sharecroppers form new, landowning communities.

But even as the South held out promise for radical change, it also harbored the greatest reservoir of resistance to the New Deal. Southern Democratic senators monopolized key committee chairmanships by virtue of their seniority, itself a blatant example of the stifling effect of disenfranchisement. These southern senators formed the nucleus of opposition to Roosevelt’s policies within his own party. In the 1936 presidential campaign, some had walked out of the Democratic National Convention rather than accept African Americans into the new Democratic coalition Roosevelt was constructing.

Lumpkin’s 1940 book, *The South in Progress*, was meant as an intervention in this fight over the direction of the South and of the nation. A commanding synthesis of existing historical work and social analysis, it offered readers a view of the South’s situation and prospects through antiracist, democratic socialist, and implicitly feminist eyes. *The South in Progress* is an archetypal text of the

Southern Popular Front in that it puts the progressive struggle in the South at the heart of the national progressive struggle. Early in the introduction to the book, Lumpkin argues that “a common basis of action should exist between like-minded groups in the different sections of the country. . . . Labour and other progressive groups of the North need to see how closely their own welfare is tied into the solution of southern problems. Similar groups in the South must more than ever seek a nationwide, as well as a Southwide approach to them.”¹³

In Lumpkin’s view, the racial policies of the Jim Crow South undergirded an economy structured against working people, both black and white. The sharecropping system that had developed in the wake of the failure of Reconstruction-era efforts at land reform, along with the imminent mechanization of southern agriculture, threatened to immiserate southern farmers. In industry, racial discrimination was used to hold down everyone’s wages. The lack of basic civil liberties, enforced with violence, prevented challenges to this system of oppression. Lumpkin’s solution to this complex of problems relied on a vigorous organizing campaign by the CIO, an expansion of the more radical changes introduced by the Second New Deal, and a federal government willing to protect black and white southerners from violence and exploitation as they remade their society. Rather than portraying the South as a homogeneous source of reaction, Lumpkin pointed out the variety of efforts by black and white southern workers and their liberal and radical allies to create the conditions for regional transformation.

Throughout *The South in Progress*, Lumpkin emphasizes the structural dimensions of racism. She was convinced that “so-called racial prejudice was not innate, but a social product; even as alleged racial inferiority was nothing more than a myth. Our established institutions of segregation, subjection, discrimination, against a whole people because of race—in short, our system of white supremacy—all these were nothing more than a man-made arrangement, an historical outgrowth from certain discernible social economic conditions.”¹⁴ But she also knew from experience that racism was a violent emotion, communicated in stories and grounded in the body and the deep wells of identification with place and kin. She had seen those feelings acted out in her own family, wrestled with them in herself,

and sought to alter them through the face-to-face, person-to-person interracial work of the YWCA. The threat of fascism—understood at the time as an eruption of irrational loyalties and prejudices—brought those memories vividly to mind. Like the “hideous racism of Nazi Germany,” she wrote, prejudice burrowed “deep into the . . . emotions of many white children as they grow up.”¹⁵

Lumpkin’s reflections on childhood, emotion, and socialization suggested where she was going next. Pondering the deep structure of racial reasoning, she decided to use her own life story as a means of both representing and undoing the culture of white supremacy in which she had been raised. Published in 1946, *The Making of a Southerner* was by far her most successful book—in part because of its intrinsic merits, but also because it came to be read as an example of what the literary scholar Fred Hobson termed “racial conversion narratives,” a new genre of white southern autobiography that poured forth after World War II.¹⁶ Such narratives fit well with the influential view of race relations presented by Gunnar Myrdal in his epic 1944 study, *An American Dilemma*. On the basis of extensive fieldwork in the South carried out by research associates in the early 1940s, Myrdal concluded that racial discrimination was a “moral dilemma,” “a problem in the heart of the American.”¹⁷ The problem, as it came widely to be understood, was irrational prejudice against people of another race, which could be eradicated as individual white southerners saw the light.

But *The Making of a Southerner* looks substantially different when we read it not in the context of Myrdal’s thesis on race relations and the post-World War II tradition of racial conversion narratives, but in that of the Southern Popular Front. Throughout her memoir Lumpkin explains to her readers, in the register of felt experience rather than of abstract theory, how the links among class and race figured in her changing consciousness. As she nears the end, she argues explicitly—much as she had in *The South in Progress*—that the problems of the South were caused not only by individual prejudice but also by a form of racialized capitalism that is both produced by and produces those prejudices. Rather than stressing individual epiphanies and a social change strategy based primarily on moral suasion, she offers *The Making of a Southerner* as a meditation on

how historical memory, class structures, and racial formations intertwine; how they reproduce themselves through the socialization of children; and how education and experience coupled with collective action and governmental intervention can break that cycle.

An illuminating comparison to Lumpkin's memoir can be found in the writings of George Orwell. In the mid-1930s, Orwell had become increasingly committed to the principles of socialism, partly as a result of his discontent with colonial life in India, where he had spent most of the 1920s, and partly from observing the plight of the poor and the working class in Britain. In 1936, Orwell spent several weeks living with miners in the north of England. This experience became the basis for his 1937 book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The second part of the book is a reflection on the consuming problem of the Popular Front: how to bring the liberal elements of the middle class together with the working class in order to oppose fascism and bring about socialism. While Orwell was always vague on how social democracy could be implemented, he made some powerful observations about the forces of class prejudice that keep the middle class from allying with workers. "To me in my early boyhood," Orwell writes, "to nearly all children of families like mine, 'common' people seemed almost subhuman. They had coarse faces, hideous accents and gross manners, they hated everyone who was not like themselves, and if they got half a chance they would insult you in brutal ways." In fact, Orwell specifically compares the middle-class prejudice toward the working class with racial prejudice in the American South, observing that "a shabby-genteel family is in much the same position as a family of 'poor whites' living in a street where everyone else is a negro." After explaining the origins and logic of class prejudice, Orwell goes on to explain, "When later on I got rid of my class-prejudice, or part of it, it was in a roundabout way and by a process that took several years."¹⁸ The framework of self-transformation in *The Road to Wigan Pier* is nearly identical to that of *The Making of a Southerner*. Lumpkin, a dedicated internationalist, would have readily seen the connections that later generations of observers, thinking that her book about the American South was about only the American South, would overlook.

The Making of a Southerner, then, sees the race problem from a white southerner's point of view, but it does so within the tradition

of Orwell's analysis of the origins of class prejudice and the obstacles that both race and class exploitation present to the creation of a just social order. *The Making of a Southerner* deepens and personalizes the historical analysis laid out in *The South in Progress*. In *Eli Hill*, Lumpkin zeroed in on the part of that history that set the pattern for the rest and tried to render that history from a black point of view. As she added near the end of *The Making of a Southerner*, "How could we [whites] know all or even much, who had not grown up on the Negro side?"¹⁹ To write of the "Negro side" was an act not of memory but of imagination, and for this new venture, Lumpkin turned her hand to fiction.

Lumpkin had discovered Elias Hill's story in the course of writing *The Making of a Southerner*. She knew, at some level, that her own father had participated in the reign of terror that had helped to crush Reconstruction. She had seen with her own eyes his capacity for violence, when, at the tender age of eight, she had glimpsed this paragon of chivalry, contorted with rage, beating the family's African American cook. She had pored over the 1871 Ku Klux Klan hearings, their thin pages cramped with small type, partly in search of the truth about her father. She did not find him there, but her view of the South and its history had been profoundly altered by those first-person accounts, which "stripped away from the Reconstruction period the overlay that so completely distorted it."²⁰

Hill was born a slave in an area that Lumpkin knew well: the Clay Hill community in York County, South Carolina, not far from where the Lumpkin family had lived briefly on a hardscrabble farm. Disabled at seven, most likely by polio, Hill was, as he described it, "among if not the worst afflicted person known on earth." His limbs were "skin and bone, small as those of a child, and drawn up around his body like handles to a vase." "Unable to walk, sit, or crawl, or to turn over in the bed without" assistance, he depended for survival on the solidarity and ingenuity of the black community, whose members carried and cared for him throughout his life. Around 1840, Elias's blacksmith father purchased his own freedom from the estate of William Hill, the owner of Hill's Iron Works and the largest slaveholder in York County. He later bought his wife, Dorcas, who was

classified as a “mulatto” in the 1860 census, “getting Elias along with her, as a burden of which his master was glad to be rid.” At some point Elias’s father disappeared, leaving the family to subsist in the legal limbo and penury that were the lot of most free blacks in the antebellum South. Despite his afflictions, Elias struck virtually everyone as “a remarkable character.” Little by little, over a fifteen-year period, he learned to read, he said, from “passing school children.” Set apart in the eyes of both blacks and whites by a keen intelligence and a voice “of unusual power and sweetness,” Hill became a teacher and a Baptist minister at the end of the Civil War.²¹

In *Eli Hill*, Lumpkin portrays the Reverend Elias Hill as a bookish man who wanted only “security and quietness and enjoyment of the good things of the mind.” Hill’s life, however, “could no more be separated from the condition of his people than I as a child could escape my heritage of White Supremacy.” “Reluctantly . . . he [was] drawn into the issues of the times, the intense conflicts, the harsh decisions, and the terrible sanctions.”²² Reluctantly or not, the historical Elias Hill became president of York County’s Union League, which led the freedpeople’s resistance to whites’ concerted efforts to “put . . . black people down.”²³ At the same time, he began contemplating emigration to Liberia, writing to the American Colonization Society for information and sharing what he learned with a network of families linked by kinship, political involvement, and church participation.²⁴

In the winter of 1870–71, York County became the epicenter of Klan terror. The historian Allen W. Trelease estimated that 90 percent of the county’s white male citizens were sworn members.²⁵ For months, white marauders terrorized blacks in Elias Hill’s neighborhood, forcing men, women, and children to sleep in the woods at night. Hill, however, refused to “sleep out,” convinced that “my pitiful condition would screen me.”²⁶ But one night he awoke to the sound of galloping horses, barking dogs, and shouting men. He heard his sister-in-law scream as Klansmen, their faces masked and their voices disguised, whipped her until she cried, “Yon is his house,” pointing across the yard.²⁷ The six invaders dragged Hill into the yard and pounded him with their fists; one man lashed him with a horsewhip and cut his hip, which, Hill said, “was almost the only place he could hit my body” because his limbs were so contracted.²⁸

The men ransacked his house, scattering his pencils and books and shattering his prized clock.²⁹ Threatening his life, they subjected him to an interrogation that, for Lumpkin, was all the more chilling because its resonances with McCarthyism were so hard to miss. Had he held secret night meetings of the Union League, preached “political sermons,” read Republican newspapers, and written letters asking for information about emigration?³⁰ Had he told black men to burn whites’ houses and “ravish all the white women?”³¹ Above all, would he promise on pain of death publicly to renounce his support for the Republican Party and “interfere no more with politics?”³²

Elias Hill affirmed accusations that whites saw as damning. He had indeed used the precious gift of literacy to give voice to the freedpeople and to call on the federal government to protect them from a violent conspiracy to deprive them of their newly acquired constitutional rights. He admitted to being president of the Union League, which, while perfectly legal, had to meet in secret to avoid reprisals. But he would not confess to “what I never said, done or thought of.”³³ In particular, he would not admit to inciting blacks to violence. On the contrary, in order to bring peace to the countryside, he and his allies had negotiated a truce with their white neighbors who had “pledged . . . to protect the colored people in case of outrage,” a promise they had almost immediately broken.³⁴

So extreme was white violence in York County and across the South that Congress had finally been moved to pass the Enforcement Acts to protect the civil rights of freedpeople and to send a Joint Select Committee to “inquire into the condition of affairs in the late insurrectionary States.” When the committee arrived in Hill’s neighborhood in July 1871, he was the most prominent of the fifty-three black witnesses who braved the threat of being “run out of the state” or worse by coming forward to testify.³⁵ Facing a room full of white men, Hill told the investigators his harrowing tale. On the strength of his testimony, along with that of other black witnesses, dozens of Klansmen were put on trial, and a number were convicted.³⁶ Hundreds more fled to avoid arrest. These trials, together with the Enforcement Acts, did not save Reconstruction, but they did break the back of Ku Klux Klan in the upcountry and across the South.³⁷

Even as Elias Hill risked his life to speak out, he was preparing to emigrate. What hurt him most, it seemed, was betrayal by his white neighbors. Hill and his allies had done everything in their power to live in peace, create stable communities, support their families, and take their place as citizens in a unified and reconstructed nation.³⁸ Yet even the whites they knew best and trusted most were willing to betray them in order to retain what they had long enjoyed: a cheap, captive labor force and a monopoly on political power—or, in the case of poor whites, an ersatz conviction of white superiority.

Having “lost hope entirely,” Elias Hill faced a question that, as the legal historian John Fabian Witt points out, legions of black and white southern dissidents have confronted: “Shall we fly, or shall we resist?”³⁹ In the end, Hill told the subcommittee, “We do not believe it possible, from the past history and present aspect of affairs, for our people to live in this country peaceably, and educate and elevate their children to that degree which they desire.”⁴⁰ He had decided to flee. Yet for him exodus was also a means of gaining a political voice, for, in Africa, the land “my father came from,” he hoped to build a free, Christian, democratic nation that would “vindicate the principles for which the emigrants believed the United States properly stood.”⁴¹

In *Eli Hill*, Lumpkin tries to portray what *The Making of a Southerner* calls “the struggle . . . against white supremacy” as African Americans “knew it and felt about it.” Indirectly, she grapples with her confusing childhood memories of her father’s violence and his involvement in the Ku Klux Klan as well as with the “sense of fear, of horror, or doom” that shadowed her own 1950s political moment. Echoing through the novel are questions that she herself was confronting: how best to exercise political courage and whether to speak out or flee, either figuratively or literally, in the face of repression.⁴²

Crafting a narrative around a compelling central character and brief set of events, Lumpkin hews closely to what she learned from the KKK hearings, while changing names and compressing and revising action for dramatic effect. In Lumpkin’s tale, Eli Hill is not foisted upon his father as a burden. Instead, his fiercely devoted mother and her second husband fight hard to find a way

to buy his freedom. As an adult, the real Elias Hill bought forty acres of land for one dollar in 1868, suggesting that he had been in informal possession for some time.⁴⁵ Apparently unaware of this event, Lumpkin portrays him as a cautious and reluctant participant in his family's quest to own their own farm. In other ways as well, her Eli Hill is no instinctive hero. His infirmity had made him uncertain of himself, and he is reluctant to accept the call to the ministry and later the call to teach. Soon enough, however, Eli Hill's church, doubling as a school, becomes the focal point of the community and the natural forum for political discussion and planning. Hesitant to join the Union League, Eli Hill eventually assumes the role of political leader that is thrust upon him. When the congressional committee arrives, he steps forward to provide his riveting testimony. Unlike Lumpkin and unlike the real Elias Hill, however, Eli decides to remain in South Carolina and to go on claiming the promises of Reconstruction. That decision makes him a marked man. Within weeks he is assassinated by two white men who go scot free.

In *Eli Hill*, Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin sought to do what only a few white writers before her had attempted: counter three generations of efforts to use fables of Reconstruction to forestall any challenges to white power. Albion W. Tourgée, a white Freedman's Bureau agent, had challenged these fables in the immediate aftermath of Reconstruction. He had even incorporated a character based on Elias Hill into his eloquent 1880 novel *Bricks without Straw*.⁴⁴ By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the view of Reconstruction advanced by Tourgée had been sidelined as white supremacists joined proponents of sectional reconciliation to create a memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction that erased characters such as Elias Hill. Populists who tried to unite poor white and black farmers were charged with opening the way to a return of "Negro rule." When child labor reformers descended on textile mills, they were portrayed as modern incarnations of devilish carpetbaggers. When the direct action phase of the civil rights movement began in the mid-1950s, it too would be attacked as another overreach of federal power.

This bogieman version of Reconstruction's history was not just embraced by the white public, North and South. It was also

propagated in the highest reaches of the historical profession. At the turn of the century, historians led by William A. Dunning at Columbia University, Lumpkin's alma mater, had written about Reconstruction from an unapologetically white supremacist perspective. They saw Reconstruction as a vindictive crime perpetrated by the North against the South, aimed at turning the proper hierarchy of society on its head by putting former slaves in positions of political power over their former masters. More generally, these historians objected to the idea that those who owned no property could legislate for those who did.⁴⁵

Yet Lumpkin's was but one voice in a broader cultural movement. *Eli Hill* began as part of a larger effort by the Southern Popular Front to draw on the historical memory of the events that followed the Civil War, not as they were understood by most white Americans—as a cautionary tale to buttress white supremacy—but as what Bruce E. Baker has termed a “radicals’ Reconstruction.”⁴⁶ A cohort of left-wing writers saw Reconstruction as a major step toward establishing a democratic, egalitarian, and nonracist society. The success of whites in thwarting this effort had initiated the sequence of events that by the end of the century had left the South a land of lynching and peonage, a place apart from the mainstream of American progress and prosperity. These leftists looked to the history of Reconstruction for clues that could help them challenge the race-baiting that divided the southern poor and dismantle the system of “racialized capitalism” known as Jim Crow.

To take one example, the *Southern Worker*, a weekly underground newspaper published in Chattanooga, Tennessee, after the Communist Party turned its attention to the American South in the mid-1930s, encouraged its black readers by emphasizing the incremental successes of the present, but it also looked to the past for inspiration. Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and other enslaved rebels provided models for overcoming psychological and practical obstacles to challenging white supremacy. But stories of uprisings by enslaved people could go only so far, providing a model of rebellion but not of how working people in the South had tried to fashion a new, more just society out of the wreckage of the old. For that, the *Southern Worker's* editor, James S. Allen, and other Marxist writers turned to Reconstruction.

Native southerners, not just new arrivals such as Allen, sought to craft a Marxist reading of Reconstruction as well. Olive Mathews Stone, a white sociologist teaching at the Woman's College of Alabama and a close friend of Lumpkin's, led a Marxist reading group in Montgomery. Her master's thesis on the history of welfare in Alabama demonstrated that the Freedmen's Bureau had played a more constructive role in Reconstruction than the Dunning School histories acknowledged. Under the auspices of the Tennessee Valley Authority, she carried out further research on Reconstruction, and she supplied this information to James Allen to form the basis of his 1937 book, *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy*.⁴⁷

Allen's book began by attacking "historians with Bourbon sympathies . . . who have failed to grasp the grandeur of this popular revolution." Reconstruction, Allen argued, was still relevant, since "the issues of that revolutionary epoch of Reconstruction still persist—land, suffrage, civil rights—casting their shadow upon the whole country." Allen's book, one in a series on American history published by International Publishers in New York (which also published *The South in Progress*), made freedpeople and poor whites the central actors in the story and highlighted moments of interracial cooperation during Reconstruction.⁴⁸

While Allen arrived at Reconstruction by means of the Communist Party's newfound interest in the South, the nation's leading black intellectual brought a newfound interest in Marxism to a long-standing interest in Reconstruction. W. E. B. Du Bois had written an article praising the Freedmen's Bureau in 1901 as the Dunning School interpretation of Reconstruction was taking shape, but he had set the topic aside a few years later to turn his attention to the NAACP. By the early 1930s, Du Bois was teaching at Atlanta University and reading Marx. In response to a wildly popular and intensely racist account of Reconstruction published in 1929—*The Tragic Era* by Claude G. Bowers—Du Bois set to work on a counterargument, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*. Using research by his own graduate students and the products of the Negro history movement, Du Bois's 1935 book told a story of how black laborers had built the nation's prosperity and then, after the Civil War, had initiated government programs to serve working people, including the South's first system of public schools. But the national forces

of capital and reaction soon overpowered what Du Bois called this southern “dictatorship of labor.”⁴⁹

The Marxist vision of Reconstruction was given another boost during World War II with the publication of Howard Fast’s novel *Freedom Road*. The story of a fictional slave named Gideon Jackson who leaves his South Carolina plantation to join the Union Army, *Freedom Road* follows Jackson’s postwar career as a politician and local leader. At the 1868 state constitutional convention, Jackson and a poor white delegate learn to overcome their mutual suspicions and work together for measures that would benefit working people, both blacks and whites. Jackson returns to his old plantation and helps his neighbors buy the plantation and turn it into a collective farm. Eventually, the Ku Klux Klan destroys the collective, killing Jackson and the last hope for racial equality in the South. Fast’s novel, while using the history of Reconstruction more as the basis for an allegory than for a detailed historical recounting, sold well and was favorably reviewed, in part because it resonated with the broader goal of wartime racial unity, suggesting that the postwar period could be another opportunity to achieve racial harmony on the basis of workers’ rights.⁵⁰

Lumpkin’s *Eli Hill* stands firmly in this countertradition but departs from it in significant ways. Lumpkin believed that overcoming the divisions between black and white workers was critical to social change, but she does not portray Reconstruction as a realization of that interracial ideal. Instead, she surrounds her protagonist with black men and, most strikingly, with outspoken black women who are involved in densely layered relationships and reliant on varying strategies of resistance and survival. At the same time, she pits Eli Hill against Judge Temple, a white paternalist who has helped Hill’s family from time to time and who tries to convince him to depend on white benevolence and to “interfere no more with politics.” This was the character Lumpkin’s editors wanted her to magnify. They also wanted her to narrow her canvas by eliminating “interesting irrelevancies” in her portrayal of the black community. They hoped that, instead, she could give her book contemporary relevance by homing in on Hill and Temple, whom they saw as two middle-of-road men, one black and one white, trying to negotiate a moderate solution to the conflicts of their times. The problem, one critic

observed, was that “in her prejudice on the racial question, Miss Lumpkin is unable to represent a truly good, baffled white southerner of the period.”⁵¹

When Lumpkin finally abandoned *Eli Hill* in the mid-1950s, she turned with relief to what would prove to be her last and, in some ways, her most personal project: a biography of South Carolina’s Angelina Grimké, who, with her sister Sarah, had been a central figure “in the anti-slavery movement at the period of its greatest vigor and power, and [a prime mover] in the emerging cause of women’s rights.”⁵² Lumpkin contacted Alfred A. Knopf, who had published *The Making of a Southerner*. “I am ready to write,” she told him. “I have had access to all of these [first-person materials] in the originals; my notebooks are bulging. . . . It is my intention to use this abundance with all the creativeness and imagination that I can command.” Knopf sent back a tepid response. Her book would have to be lively indeed “to lift [itself] out of the general class of respectable biographies of minor figures.”⁵³ In the long and ultimately futile search for a commercial publisher that ensued, this reluctance to see women as historical actors, although usually unspoken, cropped up again and again. Equally daunting was the Cold War mentality that shaped scholars’ assessments of the abolitionists just as it had editors’ reactions to “Eli Hill.” Most historians who noticed the Grimké sisters at all portrayed them and their allies not as scholars now see them—as activists who made black freedom thinkable to significant numbers of white people for the first time—but as reckless, uncompromising fanatics who pursued the perfectionist principle of “immediate emancipation” without regard to consequences.⁵⁴

In *The Making of a Southerner*, Lumpkin reckoned with how white children learn race, class, and gender at their parents’ knees and with the slow, back-and-forth process by which those lessons can be unlearned. But she did so within a frame of reticence about her sexuality and left-wing politics. In *Eli Hill*, she tried to look at the world that had made her through the eyes of someone whose life experience could hardly have been more different from her own. Published at the height of the women’s liberation movement and at a moment when the study of southern women’s history was

just getting off the ground, *The Emancipation of Angelina Grimké* stands as perhaps our most intimate study of a giant in a relatively little-noticed southern feminist antiracist tradition. In this book, as in all of her work, Lumpkin wrestled with the South's history and sought to shape its future while at the same time doing what the literary scholar Hermione Lee, writing about the novelist Alice Munro, characterizes as "asking questions of herself, returning to her own life as to an unresolved problem."⁵⁵

When, in the 1970s, young scholars and interviewers began to find their way to her door, Lumpkin was reluctant to acknowledge the years she had devoted to writing *Eli Hill*. She had always aspired to "academic study" and a professional career, she said. Her sister Grace Lumpkin, a well-known proletarian writer, was the one who had wanted to be a novelist, which "usually makes much more of a stir in the world."⁵⁶ Privately, however, Katharine revisited the manuscript into which she had poured the emotions that reckoning with the legacy of Reconstruction and living through McCarthyism aroused.

In pages of scribbled notes, she listed her characters and identified her themes. She examined her own motives and choices, raising but rejecting the possibility that she had chosen her protagonist not only because he so poignantly symbolized the destructive effects of white supremacy on African Americans and the overwhelming obstacles they had to overcome but also because of some unexamined personal identification with a reluctant leader and a disabled and, finally, murdered man. Mapping out yet another set of revisions, she wrote and rewrote a separate set piece called "The Hearing" about Eli Hill's dramatic appearance before the Joint Select Committee in 1871.⁵⁷

We have included "The Hearing" as a chapter in this publication of Lumpkin's long-languishing manuscript. It fills a gap in her story. At the same time, the ways in which it departs from historical reality illuminate the author's experience and the era in which she labored over *Eli Hill*. At the actual hearings, the committee's questions were geared toward learning the truth about Elias Hill's experiences, and he responded with an unvarnished account of his life, political activities, and suffering at the hands of the Ku Klux

Klan. Katharine, however, portrays the interrogators' questions as echoes of the hostile accusations of the KKK. In so doing, she evokes the trauma that she, Dorothy Douglas, and so many of their friends experienced during the "Great American Inquisition."⁵⁸ As Hill sits facing an all-white crowd, one witness after another comes forward to suggest that he brought his suffering on himself by getting mixed up in politics rather than lining up "with the respectable white people." When Hill himself is finally allowed to speak, a white southern Democrat on the committee, offers this *j'accuse*:

"By your secret meetings, [you] made white men insecure, arousing their suspicions that you stirred up hatred, race for race, incited your people."

"Yes, I heard them [testify] here," Hill answers.

"And you were urged to compromise, to use your influence against extremism, and for moderation."

"I know what I did."

"You've sown the wind, Hill, arousing the wild irresponsible white elements—you have reaped a whirlwind."

"Am I the one who stands accused?"⁵⁹

Katharine's chapter "The Hearing" departs from the historical record in a variety of other minor ways. Most significantly, it makes no mention of the fact that the real Elias Hill and 167 of his neighbors from York County did move to Liberia the year after he testified before the committee. Within four months of arriving, Hill had contracted malaria and died, but the community of migrants lived on in the Liberian town of Arthington. Ironically, two of his lieutenants became members of a class of American-born elites who exploited the labor of native Liberians.⁶⁰

In York County, South Carolina, the story of Elias Hill was deliberately forgotten by the white community, as were the depredations of the Ku Klux Klan. In the early 2010s, however, a school-teacher and minister from the Liberian community where Hill and his neighbors settled reached out to his South Carolina relatives. Over the next few years a community group centered in the Allison Creek Presbyterian Church documented the connections between Clay Hill and Liberia, culminating in a 2017 celebration that included the unveiling of what is apparently the first historical marker in South Carolina to acknowledge both Elias Hill and

Klan violence during Reconstruction. During these same years, the white documentarian Spenser Simrill, whose ancestors once held twenty-eight members of Hill's family in bondage, began reconstructing the Simrill-Hill shared family history. The story of Elias Hill thus lives on, in the historical marker; in the work of Albion W. Tourgée, John Fabian Witt, and Spenser Simrill; and now in this novel by Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin. We feel confident that she would be delighted to be in this company and to know that her labor is finally seeing the light of day.⁶¹

NOTES

1. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "These on Why I Chose This Crippled Man," Dec. 2, 1976 (first quote), folder 55, Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin Papers #4171, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin to Craig Wylie, June 10, 1951 [misdated; in answer to his letter of June 15, 1951] (subsequent quotes), folder 15, Lumpkin Papers.

2. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The Making of a Southerner*, with a foreword by Darlene Clark Hine (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946; reprint, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); *Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, vol. 1: Report and Minority Views (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872); *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into The Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, vol. 3: South Carolina (Washington, DC, 1872), 1406–15, 1462–79 (hereafter sc Klan Hearings).

3. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "The Hearing: A Tale I Never Heard," Eli Hill: Notes (quote), folder 55, Lumpkin Papers; Groff Conklin to Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, January 19, 1948, folder 13, Lumpkin Papers. For this depiction of Reconstruction, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 21–43; Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker, eds., *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America's Most Tumultuous Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017).

4. Groff Conklin to Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, January 19, 1948 (quote), folder 13, Lumpkin Papers. In its majority report, the committee singled out and reprinted the Elias Hill story "as an illustration of the designs of the order and the effect of [the Klan's] operations." *Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, vol. 1: Report and Minority Views (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 44–47 (quote on 44).

5. Craig Wylie to Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, June 15, 1951 (quotes), folder 15, series 1, Lumpkin Papers. See also Craig Wylie, reader's report, June 11, 1951, box 14, folder F-349-49, series F, Houghton Mifflin Fellowship Applications.

6. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*, 110-62; Emily S. Bingham and Thomas A. Underwood, eds., *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal: Essays after I'll Take My Stand* (Charlottesville: Published for the Southern Texts Society by the University Press of Virginia, 2001); Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); John Higham, "The Cult of the American Consensus: Homogenizing Our History," *Commentary* 27, no. 2 (1959): 93-100; John Higham, "Changing Paradigms: The Collapse of Consensus History," *Journal of American History* 76 (September 1989): 460-66; Arthur Schlesinger, *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).

7. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The South in Progress* (New York: International Publishers, 1940). Works pointing to a Southern Popular Front include Alex Lichtenstein, "The Cold War and the 'Negro Question,'" *Radical History Review* 72 (1998): 186; Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 5; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Sisters and Rebels: A Struggle for the Soul of America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019); and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Women Writers, the 'Southern Front,' and the Dialectical Imagination," *Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 1 (February 2003): 7.

8. Throughout this introduction, biographical information on Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin is drawn from Hall, *Sisters and Rebels*. See also Lumpkin, *Making of a Southerner*; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "'You Must Remember This': Autobiography as Social Critique," *Journal of American History* 85 (September 1998): 439-65; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Open Secrets: Memory, Imagination, and the Refashioning of Southern Identity," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1998): 109-24; and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "'To Widen the Reach of Our Love': Autobiography, History, and Desire," *Feminist Studies* 26 (spring 2000): 231-47.

9. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "Social Interests of the Southern Woman," master's thesis, Columbia University, 1919, folder 35, Lumpkin Papers.

10. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The Family: A Study in Member Roles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).

11. John A. Britton, *Revolution and Ideology: Images of the Mexican Revolution in the United States* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 132 (first quote); Dorothy Wolff Douglas, *Mexican Labor: A Bulwark of Democracy* (New York: American League for Peace and Democracy, 1939), 2 (second quote); Tore Olsson, "Sharecroppers and *Campeños*: The American South, Mexico, and the Transnational Politics of Land Reform in the Radical 1930s," *Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 3 (August 2015): 607-46.

12. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin and Dorothy W. Douglas, *Child Workers in America* (New York: Robert McBride, 1937).

13. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The South in Progress* (New York: International, 1940), 15 (quote).
14. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "Lecture to Prof. Ralph Harlow's Class—Course in 'Christian Ethics,' Smith College, Spring 1947 (following Publication of My Book *The Making of a Southerner*)," 15 (quote), folders 64–65, Lumpkin Papers.
15. Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930–1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 7–9; Lumpkin, *South in Progress*, 115 (quote).
16. Fred Hobson, *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).
17. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), xlvii (quotes).
18. On Orwell's evolving views on socialism at this time, see Alex Zwerdling, *Orwell and the Left* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 70–75; and George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Secker & Warburg, [1937] 1959), 127, 145 (quotes).
19. Lumpkin, *Making of a Southerner*, 229.
20. Lumpkin to Groff Conklin, January 15, 1948 (quote), folder 15, Lumpkin Papers.
21. Thanks to John Fabian Witt, "Elias Hill's Exodus: Exit and Voice in the Reconstruction Nation," in *Patriots and Cosmopolitans: Hidden Histories of American Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2007), 85–154, we now know a good bit more about Hill than Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin could have known. Lumpkin consulted local newspapers and other sources but seems to have relied mainly on the sc Klan Hearings. She does not seem to have read a key source: letters by and about Hill in the *The African Repository*, a publication of the American Colonization Society. Or, if she did, she chose to depart from the historical record at the climax of her novel. For our reconstruction of the historical Elias Hill's life, we are relying on the sc Klan hearings; the *African Repository*; Witt's astute and deeply researched article; and Spencer Simrill's timely suggestions. See sc Klan Hearings, 1406, 1408, 1413–14, 1477 (first and second quotes); email from Spencer Simrill to authors, October 16, 2018; "Departure of Our Fall Expedition," *African Repository* 47, no. 12 (December 1871): 354 (third and fifth quotes); and "A Remarkable Man for Liberia," *African Repository* 47, no. 9 (September 1871): 281 (fourth quote).
22. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin to Craig Wylie, June 10, 1951 [misdated; is an answer to his letter of June 15, 1951] (quote), folder 15, Lumpkin Papers.
23. sc Klan Hearings, 1407–08, 1412 (quote).
24. sc Klan Hearings, 1410, 1412.
25. Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 362–80.
26. sc Klan Hearings, 1409 (first quote), 1411 (second quote).
27. sc Klan Hearings, 1406–1409 (quote on 1406).
28. sc Klan Hearings, 1407 (quote).
29. Witt, *Patriots and Cosmopolitans*, 125; sc Klan Hearings, 1407, 1467, 1477.
30. sc Klan Hearings, 1407 (quote), 1408–09.
31. sc Klan Hearings, 1407 (quote).

32. sc Klan Hearings, 1407–09 (quote on 1409).
33. sc Klan Hearings, 1477 (quote).
34. sc Klan Hearings, 1410 (quote).
35. sc Klan Hearings, 1411 (quote), 1477.
36. Witt, *Patriots and Cosmopolitans*, 126–27.
37. Lou Falkner Williams, *The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials, 1871–1872* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 105.
38. Witt, *Patriots and Cosmopolitans*, 86; sc Klan Hearings, 1410.
39. sc Klan Hearings, 1411 (first quote); Witt, *Patriots and Cosmopolitans*, 101 (second quote). Witt draws this key concept from Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). Hirschman argues that dissatisfied members of institutions, including citizens of a nation-state, face two options: they can voice their grievances and seek change, or they can leave. Loyalty usually discourages exit, but exit can be, as it was for Elias Hill, a form of loyalty to the institution's ideals. As Witt notes, in politics, exit is not usually the dominant strategy, but it plays an important role in realigning the balance of power for those who seek change. The mass migration of African Americans to the North during and following World War II is a prime case in point. See also Peter Coclanis and Bryant Simon, "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: African American Strategies for Day-to-Day Existence/Resistance in the Early Twentieth-Century Rural South," in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900–1950*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 189–209.
40. sc Klan Hearings, 1410, (quote).
41. sc Klan Hearings, 1412 (first quote); Witt, *Patriots and Cosmopolitans*, 88, 101–4, 153 (second quote).
42. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin to Craig Wylie, June 10, 1951 [misdated; is in answer to his letter of June 15, 1951] (first quote), folder 15, Lumpkin Papers; Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "These on Why I Chose This Crippled Man," December 2, 1976 (second quote), Eli Hill: Notes, folder 55, both in Lumpkin Papers.
43. Email from Spencer Simrill to the editors, October 16, 2018.
44. Albion W. Tourgée, *Bricks without Straw: A Novel*, edited and with a new introduction by Carolyn L. Karcher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
45. For an overview of the Dunning School, see the essays in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, ed. John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013). Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 83–121, argues that opposition to Reconstruction coalesced around themes of class as much as themes of race.
46. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*, 110–44.
47. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*, 128.
48. James S. Allen, *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy (1865–1877)*, (New York: International, 1937), 215 (quote); Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*, 129–30.

49. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*, 122–25; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*, introduction by David Levering Lewis (1935; reprint, New York: Free Press, 1992), 185 (quote).

50. Howard Fast, *Freedom Road* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*, 131–35.

51. sc Klan Hearings, 1409 (first quote); Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet*, 337–42; Craig Wylie to Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, June 15, 1951 (second quote), folder 15, Lumpkin Papers; Craig Wylie, reader's report, June 11, 1951, box 14, folder F-349–49, series F, Houghton Mifflin Fellowship Applications; Craig Wylie, reader's report, November 30, 1951 (third quote), box 14, folder F-349–49, series F, Houghton Mifflin Fellowship Applications.

52. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "Angelina Grimké: A Problem in Biography," paper given before Wells College Faculty Club, February 1959, 3 (quote), folder 67, Lumpkin Papers.

53. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin to Alfred A. Knopf, October 22, 1955 (first quote); Lumpkin, "Notes on a Biography of Angelina Grimké (Now in Progress)," October 2015 (second quote), attached to Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin to Alfred A. Knopf, October 22, 1955; H. W. to Alfred A. Knopf, October 25, 1955 (third quote), all in box 172 [folder 14], Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., Records, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.

54. Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer, eds., *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism* (New York: New Press distributed by W. W. Norton, 2006); Suzanne Cooper Guasco, "The War against Slavery, Reconsidered and Reframed," *Reviews in American History* 43, no. 1 (March 2015): 60, 62. Lumpkin had been at work on her book for almost six years when Louis Filler's *Crusade against Slavery, 1830–1860* (New York: Harper, 1960) appeared. Filler rejected the then-dominant view of the abolitionists as irresponsible fanatics, and his was the secondary work upon which she most strongly relied.

55. Hermione Lee, "Alice Munro's Magic," *New York Review of Books* 62, no. 2 (February 5, 2015): 30 (quote).

56. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin interview by Christina Looper Baker, March 22, 1987, 2–3, 13 (first quote), 15 (second quote), in Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's possession; Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin interview by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, August 4, 1974, Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 84, 86, 90.

57. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "These on Why I Chose This Crippled Man," December 2, 1976; Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "Re Eli Hill," [1976], both in Eli Hill: Notes, folder 55, Lumpkin Papers. For two drafts of this vignette, see Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "The Hearing," folder 52; Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, "The Hearing: A Tale I Never Heard," Eli Hill: Notes, folder 55, both in Lumpkin Papers.

58. Athan G. Theoharis and John Stuart Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

59. Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, “The Hearing” (quotes), folder 52, Lumpkin Papers.
60. Witt, *Patriots and Cosmopolitans*, 85, 146–50.
61. South Carolina ETV, “Groundbreaking Historical Marker Installed in York, SC,” June 7, 2017, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uu3kYj8yFB4> (accessed November 19, 2018); Spenser Simrill, *Once Removed: From the KKK To Liberia, One Family’s Quest to Reconcile Itself* (forthcoming from the University of Georgia Press).

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

The copy text for *Eli Hill: A Novel of Reconstruction* is a typescript of 337 pages occupying folders 52 through 54 of the Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin Papers in the Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The date of this sole surviving copy of the novel is uncertain, though we can speculate based on other material, as discussed in the introduction, and we believe that this typescript dates from the early 1970s, when Lumpkin returned to the material one last time. The typescript itself is very clean with minimal handwritten comments. As a result, we believe it is as close to a finished product as Lumpkin could produce, so we have tried to present it as close to her form as possible, though when there were edits written in pencil on the manuscript, we tried to include those, as they seemed to represent Lumpkin's final thoughts. We have kept all of the dialect spellings that she included in an attempt to convey the spoken language of the South Carolina Piedmont, though we have silently corrected some typographical or grammatical errors. We have standardized the treatment of dashes, hyphens, and quotation marks and silently altered punctuation and capitalization to conform with contemporary convention in many cases. The typescript contains sections with names that we have retained as part titles.

The most significant editorial decision we made was the placement of the material in the section titled "The Hearing," the typescript of which is in folder 52, separate from the two folders that contain the rest of the typescript of the novel. As discussed in the introduction, we believe this section to have been composed separately from the rest of the novel but with the intention of being integrated into it. Lacking any guidance from the author, we have placed it where we thought it fit the best.

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Eli Hill

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1

Lame Man



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1

It is not known who gave Eli the name. In those days it was apt to be the master, or else his lady. But sometimes the baby's mother did, and in this case it may have been the mother, given the way she felt about the boy. No doubt Sarah had heard the Bible story of how the old prophet prayed to the Lord that the barren mother might have a son.

Eli lived in the upcountry of South Carolina, in the county of Clay. It was good country for those with land, rolling acres for short staple cotton, and rich stream bottoms for crops like corn. Eli's master, Squire Mark Hill, had land sufficient for his needs, and a good many slaves, perhaps a hundred. But he could always use a little boy.

At six years old, Eli began to be given chores that were fairly regular. He would mind the children while Josie went to fetch her corn meal and rake out the stalls when Big Jim was cleaning out the stables. He would often go with the wagon out to the fields and help hand out the victuals. When autumn came, he would pick cotton part of the day, carrying his own-size sack down the row, and being small, hardly needed to bend himself, except for the low-growing bolls. At seven he could even handle a hoe, of course not for long, and not the kind his mother did, hers being heavy and big such as prime field hands used.

It may seem strange that Eli remembered about that time, living miles from anywhere the way he did, and with nothing much to see but the quarters cabins and the outside of his master's big house. Of course some parts of that section were hilly and pleasant to the eye. Tall pine forests could be found. In the growing season acres of cotton would take on their well-tended looks, and rows of corn and other grain. Plenty of cultivated land could be seen. But even so, many of the woods were nothing but blackjacks, scrub-oak they are sometimes called; and waste lands were there that nothing but broom straw ever grew on. Human habitations were far apart,

more so in those days than now. Lonely was the word for that up-country, desolate in spots, some would say.

Eli did not feel that way. It seems that as a little boy he found a great many things to do. He was a child who liked to run and climb, even having trees in the nearby woods that he called his; the other slave children also called them "Eli's trees," leaving them to him. He made up games and made up stories, so that the other children hung around him, even Annie and Tom, the master's two grandchildren. And he liked to sing. As it chanced he had a voice that floated up easily out of his throat, with no seeming effort on his part. Eli and his mother used to sing a lot. He liked the country, even to the fields where broom straw waved. Especially there were one or two knolls on the master's place that he used to climb, for no reason but to look away as far as his eye could reach and see the woods stretching here and yonder, and pasture land where the cattle grazed, and cotton in the blooming season. To be sure at picking time he was not standing on a knoll, but down in the field between the rows with the other pickers.

Early one morning in the year 1840, Eli awakened, miserable and feverish. Sarah hurriedly fetched old Josie, whose duty it was to attend to such things. When the mistress heard she hastened to the quarters and sent for the master. The medicine they had for such occasions was given to the boy. And they had the doctor come ten miles from Clayville, a plain sign of the master's worry; for as he was heard to say several times, "That Eli would make a big strong field hand before many years."

Nothing did any good. The fever passed, but it left Eli more and more crippled as the months went by. His legs began to draw up and wither out of shape; his arms grew thin and the muscles weak, and his back stiff. He continued to feel pain, especially in his right side. So when the winter rains came, or even just ordinary dark chilly days, it was very bad.

Things changed for Eli after he was crippled. All he could do was sit in his chair hour after hour. They had to pick him up and put him down at need, even carry his food to him, whoever could. Night and day they began to have him stay at the cabin where Josie was, and where she cared for the little slave children. Eli's mother had wanted to tend him, but as the master told her in his patient

way, she could not be caring for the boy and stay fit for her work. It seemed a sensible arrangement, considering the fact that Sarah had to go forth at sunrise and not return till nearly dark.

Josie was nice to Sarah's little boy. Her voice was gruff, and very loud when she got outdone. The slave children knew the strength her arms had. Even though she was small and scrawny they were never slow to mind. Josie had a great deal to do, aside from keeping them in hand: some of the washing and ironing for the big house—the old master would let nobody but Josie do the ruffles in his shirts; mending mostly for the field hands, and for their children that she was tending; providing the slave children's noontime meal, which meant she had to keep on her mind the boiling pot to stir it sometimes. Josie grumbled when Eli was brought. The master heard her, though not to mind, being accustomed to Josie's grumbling. However, it seems that she fixed a chair for little Eli, stuffing some pads of calico for it so the child's bones would not get so sore. And when he would ask her to pick him up and change him around because it hurt, her hands were gentle, he was one child she never hit.

In the evenings and on Sundays Eli went to be with his mother. That was a time he never forgot, or how he felt as the day wore on and night drew nigh. Then he would begin to nag at Josie, whether it was time. Let dark fall and Sarah would come. Or more likely it would be Zeke, the man who was Sarah's husband after Eli's own father had been sold. Along Zeke would come striding through the dusk, calling to his and Sarah's little Sol, a boy of three, picking Eli up in his arms, and hurrying them along to his cabin down the quarters road. Nothing felt better to the crippled boy than to be carried in Zeke's door, have it shut, and be sat down in his own chair by the crackling fire.

Zeke being the old master's valued carpenter, he had about the best cabin on the place. It hardly mattered to him; when he was not sleeping he was too busy with other things. Scarcely would he get in the door than he would go to his bench in the corner to weave at a chair bottom or do something else of the kind. The master let Zeke use his spare time to make things and sell them to white people, keeping the little money for himself. Sarah said Zeke never put down his work till he laid his head down to sleep.

It was his mother that the boy's eyes followed, watching her move so quietly and swiftly around the room, busy at her task. Sarah would quickly get her fire going, stir up her corn meal, get the fatback frying in the skillet. After that she would have her other chores. But always there seemed time for her to lean down and kiss her boy, Eli, on the head, and pick up her little Sol, lifting him high and smiling up at him, while he would laugh out loud back at her. Not until she had things clean and straight would she sit, maybe taking up her needle for some mending, perhaps remarking, "It feels good just to sit a spell."

Then was the time that Eli felt content. Then he liked to curl himself up, listen to the soft voices of his people at their little snatches of talk, gaze into the fire, even doze. It seems the boy felt quiet at those times, really easy in his mind.

Sometimes Sarah would begin to sing. She liked to hear Eli's voice. And something in her heart needed the tunes they sang of an evening. Zeke never joined, being a silent kind of man, and besides, his hands moved much too fast to fit any rhythm. Sol would long before have dropped on his pallet on the floor and gone to sleep. Eli and his mother were the ones. One tune especially he never forgot, he taking the high notes and his mother swinging in,

Great day, the righteous marching!

Great day! God's going to build up Zi—on's walls!

Eli knew why this was a song they kept returning to. It had been his own father's favorite. He was hardly more than a tot when his father was taken away. He could faintly remember sitting of an evening in their cabin, and how his father would pick him up, sit him on his knee, maybe stroke him with his big rough hands, and many times let his voice roll out into, "Great day!"

Such times had stayed with the boy, and a few others, very faint, filled in no doubt from his mother's talk, Eli having been but three at the time. He believed that he remembered his father's going. Possibly he did, although more probably it was just a blur until he grew older and something similar happened around him, so that his early memories took form and shape, one in particular. There was the night, his own father (not Zeke) standing in the cabin door, firelight on him, his legs apart as if he braced himself. Being a tall

man, his face was far up in the shadow; the little boy could not make it out, or ever recollect what his own father's face was like, although he came to know about it as the years passed, especially because his mother had a way of saying, "I declare, Eli, you are gettin' to look just like your pa in the face." On that night all Eli saw was his father's body, bracing itself, the arms hanging down, the hands clenched. And then his father sitting on the bench, head on fists, while his mother bent over him wiping at his back, all the time her tears running down. Soon thereafter, Eli's father was sold. Up to the time of her dying day his mother would say, no doubt with a sigh, "I reckon, Eli, he was too bold. . . . Your pa was a man from Africa, stiff-necked and bold."

2

When Eli was twelve years old, on an early autumn night, long after folks had gone to sleep, he was wakened at the sound of the door of Josie's cabin being rattled, and somebody calling, "Josie, come quick!" He tried to rouse himself, but all he recollected was Josie stirring round, and the door squeaking shut. When he came awake next morning it was bright sunshine. No horn had sounded, no children come to make a lot of noise. His own mother came for him and had to shake him a little to tell him, "Eli, you better wake up. Old master is dead."

Nobody went to the fields that day. Zeke did not work in his carpenter shop. The blacksmith let the shoeing wait. The cotton gin was still as it had not been still for more than a month. Only stock was fed, the hogs given some slop, the chickens some corn. The people sat around their cabin doors all day, or stood around, subdued in their talk. When children made a noise or started to play they were shut right up. Some weeping went on. There were the old folks who had been little ones when the old master was born—they shed tears. They must have felt very old themselves, their course nearly run. Others wept some. But mostly it seemed as if the slaves had a silence hanging over them, the kind people feel when something lies ahead that they cannot know of.

Josie came back and told how it was, how a lot was going on up at the big house. She had to hasten back, they wanted her to lend a hand in the kitchen and house. The word had gone forth, folks began to come, neighbors and kinsmen from near and far. They had to be fed. Some stayed for the night if they came a long way. It took more than the old master's coachman and Big Jim to tend all the horses driven up that day, and the next, until the day of burial.

The burial day seemed a somber time. The sky took on a dreary look as late fall days sometimes can, gray clouds hanging low and heavy, while every gust of wind would start a fall of dead leaves. In the morning the quarters slaves were sent for to gather near the big

house back veranda. Sarah and Sol and Zeke went, and crippled Eli also, astride Zeke's back.

The new master Rob Abel waited on the piazza. He was the master's stepson, so he had a different name, and was a lawyer in Clayville, so that they had seen him rarely. The slaves all stared up at him, uneasy while they waited.

Eli was used to the old master's appearance, a thin old white-haired man with kindly blue eyes. Master Rob Abel was short and heavy-featured, with a very large head too big for his body. But then Master Rob began to speak to them and Eli forgot about the way the man looked. His deep voice was so mellow with a kind of quiver in it. Eli felt his eyes smart as he heard the master talk.

Master Rob told how their old master had passed on, and how he wanted them to help him in this hard time, and help their old mistress to bear her heavy grief. They must work hard, obey, and not quarrel and complain. He told them to go dress themselves nice and clean after dinner, and be ready when the horn was blown about three o'clock. "Come gather in the yard outside the front veranda. You'll follow your old master's body to his burial."

In good time the cow horn blew, and the slaves began to gather, waiting for their master to come through his big wide front door for the last time. Eli likewise waited, hoisted up high on his father's back.

They could hear the preacher's voice inside, not his words, just the sound. And hear the singing, "Rock of Ages," "Lead Kindly Light." After a while, they heard feet shuffle, saw the front door opened wide. Then they heard the heavy steps of those men carrying the burden of the master's body in his coffin, to be laid away beside his own father up on the knoll.

The preacher was the first to come through the door, his Book in his hand, his head bare. They carried the old master's body next. After the coffin walked the new master, his mother on one arm, his wife on the other. He walked with his head bowed on his chest. Not the old mistress. A black veil was covering her face, but her eyes were gazing straight ahead. She was known to be a strong-willed woman. Except that day her feet, which had always seemed so sure as she moved among her slaves attending to her duties, now appeared to stumble every step or two, as if she had to make

them walk the way they were having to go. Everybody said the old master's people thought a world of him, they found it hard to let him go.

Behind the family kinspeople came, and those who were old friends, and neighbors from near and far, and other people who seem to go to funerals. Along behind the white people came the old master's house servants who had been allowed to attend the funeral service held indoors. Butler, coachman, body servant, cook and helpers, other house slaves, and even Aunt Josie who sometimes was called upon to do things around the house. After all these had started up the road that led to the knoll, then nobody was left to go but the quarters slaves, those who had been waiting outside the house. They began to trudge behind the others, slow of step and mournfully.

In that way they came to the knoll, a big company, counting in the slaves. They laid the old master in his grave. Eli had not been to many burials. He cried, as most people did, when the hymns were sung, and when the preacher said the words about "Dust to dust. . ."

A week went by after the old master's burial. Autumn was getting on, cotton hanging heavy waiting for the pickers; field hands picked till they could not see to pull another boll. Eli was sitting at Josie's cabin watching for his folks, feeling tired. These nights Master Rob had Josie staying at the big house with her old mistress. The crippled boy was sleeping at his mother's cabin. He liked to, except that he had to wake and be moved at daybreak.

On that night it was getting on to dark, still they did not come. Eli was thinking he would have to call Josie to put him inside out of the chill. Faint and far away his ears caught a sound. Josie came quickly, peering out, and saying, "Land sakes!" The little ones went crowding round her clinging to her skirts. And Eli felt himself begin to shake.

The sound began to swell—it was still far away, so it was hard to tell. He could hear it some, and then he was not sure. Next thing Eli knew came a piercing kind of noise as if somebody had let out a cry. And then a moan, for it was a moan, not of one but of many voices, women and men, children too, high and low. Not one sound, but it seemed like one. The people were coming in, Eli knew it now, the

cotton pickers coming from the fields, and something was wrong. Something terrible was wrong. Nothing like this had ever been heard of since the boy was born. And all he could do was wait and shiver and shake all over.

Eli saw Aunt Josie hasten outside, the little children clinging. He heard the babies inside the cabin begin a loud wailing. He was afraid Josie was going to leave him there, he outside and the babies within, all by themselves. But she stopped down the road a way, staring and listening. Then he heard feet running down the quarters road that came from the big house. A man panted near, the new master, as Eli could tell when Josie's name was called. The man's breath came loud and short.

They could only wait while the moaning, weeping people came closer and closer. The nearer they drew, the plainer were the sounds. Now Eli could hear them wailing aloud and crying out, "Lord have mercy!" And he could hear the gruff, shouting voice of the overseer. The overseer was threatening and shouting and saying that he would whip this one and that one if they did not shut up their damn racket. He might as well have shouted at a storm to hush, they paid him no attention.

As they came near the master stepped out of the shadow where he had been. In his hand was a big pine knot that he had lit; now he held it up. He stood in the road where the slaves would have to come, they would have to see him. Without a doubt it gave them a shock, seeing the white master standing there, the lighted pine knot blazing and crackling up above his head. The loud wails stopped all of a sudden in a gasp; so did the people stop right there in their tracks. Only some sobbing sounds could be heard, now here, now there.

The little boy's eyes were on the new master. The white man's face appeared of huge size, and very white in the light of the torch. The look of his eyes was terrifying. His voice when he spoke was a chilling thing, completely unlike the soft persuasive tones he used, speaking to them, when the old master died.

"Get to your cabins! Go at once!" He paused, and stillness fell. "When the horn blows, come to the big house back veranda. And don't let me hear another sound out of you!"

They went of course, by twos, by threes, they went their way. Not any sound any more, but just now and then a sob. And in the dark

Eli could hear how their feet shuffled, as if it were hard to raise them off the ground.

Eli was afraid that he had been forgotten till he saw his father coming for him out of the dark. Zeke stooped down and swung the crippled boy onto his back. He said nothing, and Eli dared not ask anything. However, the minute they were inside their door and it was shut, and he saw his mother, he cried, "What is it, mammy? What's goin' to happen?"

Sarah did not speak, nor did Zeke; but little Sol spoke, loud and shrill, "We's goin' to be sold! All of us, every last one! Master is goin' to sell the place, and every nigger on it!"

"Mammy, is it so?" Eli said.

Sarah answered him, her voice low and tired, that the overseer had said so when he got mad with Sam; yelled at them, and said they all would be sold. The racket coming in from the fields had started then.

"The horn is blowin'," Zeke said. "We'll soon know."

Eli and Sol, waiting in the cabin, after a while heard once more that sound of dragging feet on the road, many people's feet, coming with a heavy tread, although no noise, not even any talking. Then Zeke and Sarah came in the door.

"Mammy," Eli whispered, "Mammy, is it so?"

"Why ain't you asleep?" She added more gently, "Yes, it's so, Eli. But we got to get our sleep, got to be up a-workin' in the mornin'."

That night Eli's bones started up their old aching, so that he lay awake hearing every noise that the nighttime makes. Once Zeke rose, Eli could tell his step by the creak of the floorboards as he went across the room.

"Pappy," Eli whispered, "Pappy, who will buy us?"

"Go to sleep, child," his mother murmured through the dark.

He must have slept because the next thing he heard was the morning horn sounding and his folks getting up.

It was Zeke's habit when he ate his evening bite to keep right on working at whatever he made. Not so on the evening following the trouble. He sat by the fireplace, his eyes morose, hardly touching his food when Sarah gave it to him.

Presently Sarah took the seat beside him.

"You might as well tell me what he said, Zeke."

"I spoke to him," Zeke said slowly.

"Ma," Eli said, "what's goin' to happen to us?"

"Go on and tell me, Zeke," Sarah said.

"He said he knew." Zeke paused between the words. "He said old master left it wrote down that I could buy myself, and buy you and Sol, when he passed on."

"What's wrong then?" Sarah said.

"Mammy," Eli whispered, pulling at her dress.

"I told him," Zeke said, "how old master had told me that I wouldn't have to pay very much. He said, 'Look here, Zeke. You're getting' on, and yet you're still a valuable nigger. Sarah is more so, she's in her prime, and Sol'll be worth a lot when he gets bigger.' I told him, 'Master Rob, Sarah's my wife, Sol's my child.' He said, 'That's right, Zeke. And I ain't one to separate families. But,' said he, 'I've got my old ma to think about. I've got my own wife and children to support. Sol and Sarah are worth a heap of money.'

"So then I told him," Zeke let out a sigh, "that I 'spec I'd saved sufficient to pay for my family. I told him what old master said I'd have to pay."

"Tell us what he said, Pappy," Sol shrilled.

Zeke leaned over and poked at the fire.

"Zeke!" Sarah said.

"He said," Zeke muttered, "there's Sarah's little cripple. Zeke, I ain't a hard man"—Sarah was staring—"I'm good to my darkies, like my stepfather was"—O God A'mighty, Sarah, I don't recollect all he said. He just said he had his own to think about, and he was losin' money on you and Sol, and look at the expense the old master had had a-feedin' a cripple all these years. And that I had a duty. I owed it to old mistress. I'd have to pay something for Eli, Sarah—"

"Zeke," Sarah towered, looking down on her husband, "no white man on this earth's got a right to ask any pay for a poor cripple child—" her eyes flashed to Eli and she kind of caught her breath—"the look on his face as if she'd reached out and slapped him. She was at his side, hugging him close against her.

"Old master had said one hundred fifty dollars for me, and two hundred fifty for you and Sol together. I got that much. I got a little more, maybe two-three dollars. Now Master Rob says he wants another fifty. . . . It took me twenty year to save what I got!

I don't have fifty more! That's all I've got and I don't know what to do. . . ."

Eli had never known a longer night; he could not get warm no matter how he tried. He called to his mother and she came to his mattress, which she had pulled up close to the dying fire. She heated a brick in the remaining coals and wrapped it in a shirt and put it at his shriveled feet. She got down on her knees and rubbed his back, comforting him until the shivers had subsided.

As drowsiness took hold, Eli's thoughts turned to his father. Where did his pappy go, he wondered to himself. Where might he be now? Would he ever see his pa? His mother always said, "There ain't no tellin', Eli. They sold him somewhere." He oftentimes wondered, the way he wondered now. . . .

Eli had drifted off to sleep, when he suddenly awakened, crying out loud, so that his mother came to him murmuring, "Hush, child, hush!" He had dreamed an awful dream, though once he came awake some parts of it were queer and indistinct. Evidently he was well and strong again, and out in the woods, on his feet, playing. He was in the act of climbing up a tree or something, when dusk dropped abruptly, darkness crept around. He made haste to turn back toward the quarters, when he heard a sound that stopped him in his tracks. It came to him drifting through the dusk, maybe a groan, but it sounded like a roar. Then he saw two eyes like pieces of fire shining at him a little piece away. And behind the eyes he could see a head, and see a body. In a flash he guessed what stood near. "Eli," they had told him lots of times, "you keep away from that lot where the big bull stays; he's fearsome and mean, he'd gore you sure. Those eyes were coming closer, and looking mighty strange; that terrifying bellow was sounding louder. He whirled around to skin up a tree; he even grabbed at a limb, expecting to leap. . . . He could not use his legs. He was crippled—he had thought he was well—all the time he was nothing but a cripple. It was really dark now, pitch black dark. Not a living soul was near, nobody to help him. That awful beast he could hear bearing down, its bellow drawing closer, its eyes big and shiny. . . . Eli found his voice, letting out a scream, and heard his mother saying, "Hush, honey, hush."

Always those days stood apart, each by itself, in the memory of the boy. On that one the people came weeping home from the fields.

The next one, his pa told them of lacking money with which to buy him. There came the one when his ma told the master to his face . . .

It was night time. Inside the cabin a blazing fire spread light and threw shadows. Nobody seemingly had a wish to talk, except once Sarah said, low and scolding, “Zeke, won’t you quit that work long enough to swallow your victuals?” They could hear the scrape and rustle of the rushes that Zeke wove into a chair seat. Otherwise nothing but stillness. Little wonder that Eli jumped, when from right outside their door a loud voice crashed against the quietness, “Zeke, you here?”

Zeke jumped up, knocking the bench over. Sarah dropped her mending as she rose. Zeke said, “Sol, get up quick off that pallet! You, Eli, mind your manners!” Next thing the master was standing in the door.

Eli saw his father do as he was meant to—bend his knee, touch his forehead, likewise Sol, copying his pa; and Eli heard Zeke’s sharp whisper, to that he too mumbled, “Evenin’, master.” Not his mother, although his eyes were glued on her. He wanted to scream as if in warning, “Ma, ma!” At last he saw her knee bob. Only her knee. Her head never so much as bent, nor did her eyes drop the way they ought. Master Rob, however, appeared to notice nothing, he did not act as though anything was amiss.

He came inside and, going to the fireplace, stood, his back to it, gazing at the room. Eli heard him begin his talking, all about how badly this trouble made him feel.

Of course it was frightening. Eli grew confused. He heard some things, but then his mind wandered. In his anxiety he felt like a caught creature, bound to his chair.

The master’s dark shadow caught the boy’s attention, and he scanned the huge shape cast by the dancing flames. The master was saying how he had his obligations, and must think of their old mistress, do his duty by her. Moreover (this came louder), it went against his conscience to free one slave, let alone four. He did not believe in slaves going free. It could only bring ill to them and to the country.

“Yes, sir, yes sir, master,” Eli heard Zeke’s muffled words. His mother said nothing, nor dared he look at her.

However, said the master, he had no choice. Their old master made the promise, and he would let Zeke go.

Zeke sighed loudly. Sarah shuffled her feet, so that Eli cast a fearful glance in her direction.

"On the other hand . . ." Master Rob began to speak of the state of prices that were picking up at last. Did they know, he said, that he was losing several hundred dollars on Sarah and Sol? He added, "Even so, I'm a man of honor. The price my father set I'll live up to."

"My father's will," he said, "didn't mention the lame boy." Master Rob stopped like a man in thought. "I had a proposition made to me yesterday. If Zeke will but do it, it will solve everything. Of course I don't push you, it don't matter to me."

"Master," Zeke said, "I'd do most anything. . . ."

"I saw Squire Temple's son in Clayville, young Mister John. He's been out here sometimes. A fine old family. Mister John's gettin' married. He's practicing law so he'll live in town. His father is givin' him a few servants from the family place, but John can use others. I told him about you and your children."

"Yes sir, Master Rob," Zeke murmured.

"I told him you'd been savin', and had got it in your head that you wanted to go free. And I was doin' what a master could to help you, lettin' you buy Sarah and Sol at a sacrifice to your old mistress. But there was the expense of a cripple all these years. And there was my duty to teach you what is right, and not let pity blind me to it. We talked awhile. Then he put a proposition, if I kept you all, would I hire you out to him? He'd pay me wages for you, which would be all right with me. And he'd let you do like you've been doing here, work in your spare time till you could pay for Eli, then I'd give you the papers settin' you all free.—Wait a minute, Sarah. Let me finish what I'm sayin'—I told him, Fine. But that your old master had promised Zeke his freedom now. I was honor-bound. So Zeke must decide."

"Master," Zeke muttered, "I ain't got enough. Not for the crippled child."

"Exactly, Zeke. So my advice is, accept Mr. Temple's offer."

"Master Rob!" said Sarah.

"I advise you to do it."

"Master Rob," Sarah said, "Zeke has been savin' more'n twenty years to buy his freedom. Old master said he could sure go free

when he passed on. Master Rob, I'd rather Zeke went free now. Me and Sol and Eli will be obliged to wait, if that be required. Zeke'll save enough money to buy us all soon."

"No, Sarah!" Zeke said. "That I won't do."

"Why, Sarah," said the master, "I reckon you don't understand. I'm sellin' this plantation, the land's clean worn out, it has been losin' money, it was my father's wish. I'm sellin' all the field hands. You'll get sold, you and Sol. As for your crippled boy"—Master Rob eyed Eli's legs till the boy shut his eyes so he would not see—"I don't know about him. Few would want to take a cripple, all the burden that means. If you're sold, Sarah, I don't know where you'd be taken." He shook his head. "Sarah, use your common sense. I'm tryin' to see a way to keep you all together. Now comes this fine proposal of Mr. Temple's. I advise you all to take it. What do you say, Zeke?"

Eli held his breath. A moment never had seemed so endless. "Going free." It felt so vague and scary, but when the master spoke of their remaining together. A mute plea rose in him, Ma, do what he says.

"Yes, sir," Sarah held her voice flat and steady. "We thank you, Master Rob. But me and Eli can't stand between Zeke and his child goin' free. Maybe he'll buy Sol and take him with him. But I can't leave Eli, and Zeke don't have enough. I reckon somebody'll just have to buy me, and take my lame boy along o' me."

Master Rob said gruffly, "Sleep over it, Zeke." And he slammed the door a little when he went out.

Next day the master sent Josie to fetch them. They found him seated in the dining room at the head of the long dining table, a younger man seated beside him. Dinner had been cleared away. Master Rob motioned Zeke to set Eli on a chair. Zeke, Sarah, and Sol remained standing, Sarah with her hand on Eli.

When the master spoke it was in a gruff voice. He began at the beginning and explained everything, including what Zeke and Sarah could do. And even little Sol. He did not mention Eli. Young Temple listened, offering no comment.

"Well, Zeke," said the master, "have you made up your mind? If you have, Mr. Temple and I will fix the papers."

"It's this way, Master Rob," Zeke said. "Old master promised . . ."

"I know what he promised. We've been over that. Don't you want to keep your family together?"

"Yes, sir, master."

"Master Rob!" Sarah said.

"No, Sarah, this is for Zeke to say."

"I don't want them, Mr. White, if they don't want to come." Young Temple was frowning. "Zeke, you know I'm trying to help you? I can get other servants, I don't need you. As I understand it, you don't have quite enough to buy—your whole family."

"Yes, sir, the crippled boy. Master Rob say I got to pay for the cripple."

"Yes, yes, I know."

"I've got my conscience to answer to, Zeke," the master said. "And so have you."

"I aim to pay, master."

"I can see no good reason," young Temple said, "if you've got a good master, why you want to go free. I told Mr. Abel I'd buy you all myself, including the boy, to keep your family together. I don't think a free black man's life is a very happy one—that's been my observation. However, I take it your mind is made up. Your old master made this promise—and kind and generous it was. If you want to buy yourself, you've got the legal right. And your master has consented to let you buy your wife and children too. However, if you don't have enough yet . . . I've said I'd hire you all from him. It's not my usual way—practically all of our servants have been brought up by my family. But if you and your family will serve me well, then I'm ready to help you, even help you buy yourselves. Is that right, Mr. Abel?"

"That's right, Mr. Temple."

"Master, I do thank 'y. I won't never forget that you was willin'."

"Can't you wait a year or two, Zeke? In your own interest—there's your family to think of."

"Yes, sir, I want to buy them real bad right now. I've got 'most enough, sir."

"Wait a little while and you can buy them all."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Temple. But maybe something might happen. I'm scared to wait, sir, I sure am . . ."

"Mr. Temple, sir!" said Sarah.

"Let Zeke talk, Sarah," Master Rob said.

"What on earth is it you're afraid of?" Temple said. "I'd treat you well. You know that."

"Yes, sir." Zeke fumbled with his hat. "I aim to go free, sir. Ain't nothin' else. Just seemed like I want to be a free man. And now old master's gone . . ."

"Give it up, Mr. Temple," the master said, disgust in his voice. "It takes a black to be real ornery."

"What will you do, Zeke?" John Temple said, "if you don't have enough? You've got this crippled boy. What will you do? Have you thought about that?"

"Please, sir, Mr. Temple!" Sarah burst out. "Couldn't we all go free now, and you let him sign a paper to be owing you that money? He'd soon work it off, work his fingers to the bone. I would too, please, sir, Mr. Temple."

"Sarah!" Master Rob said.

"I am shocked, Sarah!" Temple's face had turned a deep red. "That's very wrong of you. Sir," he said to his host, "if I unwittingly occasioned that outburst, I apologize, sir. I would not think of interfering in your affairs."

"I'm sure of that, sir. You all go now, Zeke. I'm pretty disgusted—this fine opportunity. I've done my best to help you. So has Mr. Temple. Go on back to the quarters. Go get to work."

The following day, in the late evening, when his mother came to take him home, Eli's face looked his misery. When his glance met her eyes, the tears began to slip out and roll down his cheeks. Sarah, like Zeke, usually carried her boy astride her back, it was easier so, but on this evening, she held him in her arms, and all the way home she kept him pressed against the comforting warmth of her breast.

In the cabin she sat him on his chair. "Look-here, chile"—busying herself with her skillet—"you ain't half been eatin' like you ought. I'm goin' to make some nice hot corn pone, and I got a little molasses from Aunt Josie. You begin right now to get your mouth ready."

A noise outside and Sol rushed in screaming, "Pappy is a-runnin'!"

Sarah dropped her skillet with a bang on the floor.

Zeke stood planted in the doorway, his face streaming sweat, breath laboring. He gulped and got out the wonderful words, "He'll do it!"

Little Sol yelled. Sarah cried, "Praise the Lord!"

Zeke, however, did something strange. Such a big man, usually so quiet, now he dropped on the bench by the fireplace and wept aloud.

Sarah went to him. "It's all right, Zeke." She patted him. "Don't cry. Tell us."

Zeke choked out, "Master'll let me sign a paper, let me owe him for Eli and pay him later on!"

"Glory hallelujah!" Sarah stood softly clapping her hands. Sol began to dance around the room.

"My saw was in the board," Zeke said. "Master come up—spoke real nice—Mr. John Temple with him—said it weren't for me—it weren't for you—you acted wrong, Sarah, talkin' back to him——"

"I did nothin' wrong!"

"Said it weren't Eli's fault that he been a burden all this time, and he felt real sorry for him——"

"*Him?*" Sarah said.

She straightened up, a scowl on her face.

"What made him, Zeke? You tell me straight out, will Eli stay tied by that paper?"

"Sarah, Sarah." Zeke raised his tear-streaked face. "Don't you understand? Tied or not tied, ain't you heard me?—we all are goin' *free!*"

"Yes. Yes . . . think of it," she whispered. "*Think of it. . .*"

Nobody had been noticing Eli. Now his mother, turning round, exclaimed in surprise, "Why, Eli's cryin'!"

There he sat bolt upright, tears streaming down his cheeks. Seeing them notice, he began to sob aloud.

With a jerk Zeke raised his head. "You Eli! You stop cryin' right this minute!"

Sarah's laughter pealed forth, joyful laughter. "Yes," she cried, "you stop, Eli, a great big boy like you!" Eli felt her arms go round him, felt her long, hard hug.

Eli's tears were stopping now. Sarah took her apron to his cheeks. "There," she told him tenderly, "there you be."

Zeke, looking shamefaced, had himself begun to smile. Now he wiped his eyes on his sleeve, blew his nose loudly with his fingers, stood up, stretched, arms and body. "Why, Sarah, I sho' am hungry."

"Me too!" young Sol shrilled.

3

The time they left the old master's place remained blurred in Eli's mind, except for feelings that remained. It had seemed fine the weeks before, talking, planning, telling each other what they would do, although they had little enough to go on, never before having been free.

On that morning all was different. Boy of twelve though he was, Eli was afraid, not knowing why. Of course he was crippled, and shy in those days, a child who had never been anywhere but the plantation where he was born. A strange sadness flooded through him on that morning. The quarters road so empty and still; where once had been a stir and chatter at daybreak now there was heard no sound at all. All through these days he had felt himself nagged, wondering where the people had gone—one day here, and then gone, melted away, swallowed up. He had pulled at Sarah, "Ma, where has Henry been sold to?" "Ma, who has bought Joe?" Carried along on his mother's back past the cabins, more than once he had felt her body stiffen, heard her muttered angry tones. Hearing inside the weeping and sobs, he would brush his hand across his own eyes. No more of that on the morning they departed, no more grief from behind those walls. Cabins were empty, doors swinging open, creaking when the wind caught hold.

It was still dark the time they went, early morning before a single streak of light. Zeke carried Eli on his back down to the barn where the wagon waited. The children, Zeke was told, might ride with some goods that were being hauled to town from the big house, he and Sarah walking behind. They themselves had few belongings, except, to be sure, the carpenter tools. "There's our daily bread," Zeke kept saying joyfully. And he would tell again how the master let him buy the tools in the same way he let him have Eli, adding the sum to the same piece of paper that Zeke put his mark to. "That was a deed!" Zeke exclaimed many times, though Sarah, Eli noticed, wore a frown at Zeke's remark.

Not even when their corn meal ran out, and Zeke came home empty handed, did Eli hear his people wishing for the old place. Some kind of change had come over them, something he sensed though he could not understand. It had been so from the time they set out on that December day. They had wrapped around him his own homespun shawl, and also his mother's precious quilt. He and Sol sat huddled together in among some bags of feed, with Sol continually pushing and grumbling, seeking Eli's body warmth. The bare fields he well remembered, dead cotton stalks lying around. Also bare woods looking gaunt, branches and twigs seeming more than anything like twisted arms and fingers reaching up. For a while a misty rain sifted on them, so that even pretty evergreen trees dripped with the wet and seemed forbidding. Eli kept thinking of the place he had left, till his thoughts made his eyes sting with tears. Nothing like tears sounded in his parents' voices when they called out to the children from where they slogged along behind. He could see their brogans sinking deep in mud, yet they did not seem to tire the livelong day. His eyes kept dwelling on his mother—her long easy stride—her strong able look. Keeping her in sight quieted somewhat his anxiety. Night dropped down while they traveled. Zeke and Sarah became lost to sight in the ever-thickening gloom. Eli grew anxious, he would call out, Sarah answering in warm cheerful tones. It was dark when they entered Clayville. Behind the glass of many windows candle and lamplight glowed. Lonesomeness overwhelmed Eli, making him shiver, and call out again through the blackness, "Ma, you there?"

They took refuge that first night in a tumble-down shelter, a cold place, rain leaking in. Neither Zeke nor Sarah uttered a complaint, nor expressed regret at what they had left. The place they finally found in which to live was removed, well out of town, off by itself. It was hard, more especially with a crippled boy who had to be carried wherever he went. And Zeke had at once to search for work—they had brought supplies enough for a few weeks only. He was often heard to wonder, "How does a man find such things?" Days went by, and still he trod the streets. Soon Sarah herself began to tramp the muddy sidewalks, knocking on back doors, asking if the mistress had any washings to give out. And she found a little work among those who owned few slaves and needed extra help.

Sometimes in these early anxious days, Sarah grew impatient with Zeke, feeling he did something wrong in freedom. This bothered Eli, as quarreling always did. There was the particular time when Zeke came home, telling them that their last name was "Hill." Sarah flung up her head almost angrily. Zeke's eyes apologized. A white man had asked him what his name was. "It's Zeke, master." Only then had he remembered that now they were free, he must take a last name. And feeling shame at having forgotten, he answered, "Zeke Hill," the name he was used to, his old master's name. Sarah had to tell the children to answer, "Eli Hill," "Sol Hill," when they were asked. Zeke was easily reconciled: "Old master was a good man." At which Sarah sighed, "I reckon it's havin' a name that really matters."

In Clayville, unknown to them, was a free colored settlement on the east edge of town. Not many people, as they found out, perhaps fifty all told, while out in the county were maybe fifty more. This was very few indeed compared with the ten thousand black people who were slaves in Clay County. Zeke had many times passed freedmen on the streets, though he could not tell, or they about him, that they were free. And as Zeke knew, and Sarah and the boys, for Zeke had warned them, now that they were free, they should show no friendliness toward whites' servants. White people would be angered by it.

Zeke first learned of their neighbors in the winter not many weeks after they had arrived. He overheard a white man on the village street say to a friend, "You might try that free nigger's store." Free. Store. Zeke told them at home how he had felt. He was stopped in his tracks, it made him so excited. He longed to inquire, but did not dare. Collecting himself and lifting his tools, he began to walk the town, street by street. It was not a large town, though spread out. Zeke's tools had time to grow very heavy, and he footsore before he could rest.

Zeke told them how, in mid-afternoon, the place stood before him, and he recognized it. In the yard adjoining, he saw a small white cottage, and a colored woman rocking on the porch—the preacher's wife, as he later found out. And the store he stood in front of had a sign above the door. Zeke could not read "Peter Baldwin, Merchandise," but he knew it for the kind of sign that merchants

had. A colored man leaned against the doorpost. Zeke inquired of him, then opened the door and peered inside.

It was dusk that day when Zeke reached home, Peter Baldwin with him. Eli shrank back at sight of the big man—this he remembered ever-afterward—his being afraid when the smiling hearty stranger loomed behind Zeke as they entered the room. However, hardly knowing when it happened, his timidity was gone, in its place a new good feeling, the opposite of fear.

Preacher Baldwin—this was how Zeke introduced him—told how he had been free fifteen years, and earning his bread from the store he had set up. He was literate. “You can read *anything*?” Eli said. “Yes, son. Once you learn, it’s that way.” On Sabbath Day his store was the church. “Poor place, maybe”—he gave a warm smile—“nothin’ to brag about. However, I concluded long ago that the Lord don’t mind.”

Sarah’s proud cry, “We can go to meetin’ now!” rang down through the years. And her words murmured softly as the preacher’s footsteps died away. “Now we all belong somewhere.”

Eli, once he had left the folks who were used to him, found himself growing self-conscious about the way his crippled legs looked. He was thin and sickly in appearance, his hands had knotted knuckles, and his eyes very often had a big shadowed look against the dark brown of his face. But all of this would have passed unnoticed, for he was not an ugly boy; on the contrary. As it was, on the streets he became aware of how people often turned and stared, as though fascinated by a child so lame; or else they turned their eyes away. His eyes were opened, his affliction was ugly, and he came to watch for and wince at people’s glances. His father made a child-sized cart for pulling him. Eli hated it, feeling that it made him more conspicuous. From this time on, let the days grow cool, he kept his knees covered with his homespun shawl.

In his thoughts he would even cry, I don’t care, I liked it better back in the quarters. The homelike road running by the cabins, big oak trees shading it. Josie around, all the little children. Folks passing, calling out, even the jokes that they wished they were lame too, so they could sit about doing nothing. They were the nicest people on earth. He would begin to see the different ones in his mind’s eye. Big Jim. Aunt Josie. Henry and Joe. Alice, a shy little black

girl, always so nice to him. And the old master's two grandchildren, Carrie and Tom, who were nearly his age—Carrie, who had once given him a little schoolbook that she was finished with.

Eli's change came more slowly, the sensing of a difference in the new life. It came in one guise, then in another—happenings that told him that he was a free child. Some marked a time to remember, but some he would just as lief have forgotten, except that he could not pick and choose his memories.

On a bright warm morning of that first summer after they were free, Sol and Sarah went forth early, returning, the day still hardly begun, their bare feet dew-drenched. Eli took the pail of berries for the preacher, picked them over for trash, laid on top wild grape leaves to keep them cool and fresh. Sarah put her shoes on, "Since I'm goin' to the preacher's house."

At Peter Baldwin's door—how his mother liked to tell of the time—Sarah called softly, "Preacher, you here?" Cracking the door and peeping in, she heard his voice say, "Come in, Sister."

She found the preacher as it seemed to her surrounded by books—a few on the table, many on some shelves, one on his knee. Sarah had never seen one of her own people owning books and able to read. With no knowing object or intention, but because she herself was deeply stirred, she murmured, "My boy Eli once learned to read a little bit."

"Eli did?" the preacher said. "That's good, Sarah. He ought to learn more. You bring the boy to me, I'll teach him to read."

"Do you dast?" Sarah said.

"You bring him," he answered.

The appointed Saturday came at last, everywhere exciting smells from sun-drenched growing things. Sarah's voice filled their cabin, scolding, gay, "Eli, stop! You'll drive me plumb crazy. One minute—you won't go—the next—you'll be late. Now be still, we'll get you there."

On the way she sang softly although Eli was hardly conscious of it. His own mind was busy, he was torn within himself, wanting to go and not wanting to.

Sarah sat him down in the preacher's little parlor, beamed on them both, and slipped out on tiptoes.

Eli sat tongue-tied. The chair felt too big. His twisted legs stuck out conspicuously and his pantaloons, shrunken from their numerous washings, kept creeping up despite his frequent tugs.

When the preacher asked him, he insisted, "I don't know how to read."

Outside the window a crepe myrtle bush filled his eyes with its soft green.

Presently the preacher began to talk. At first Eli could also hear the creaking of the floorboards under the rocker, and even the bees' loud hum outside. Those sounds soon died away. The preacher was telling Eli of the time that he himself had come to read and write as a slave boy, nearly thirty years before. The old slave who had taught him secretly was now dead those many years. Little did either of them dream that some day young Peter, the slave, would go free by his master's will. And moreover, bearing in his hands books that his master had directed them to give him; not till then had the master made known what he had found out long before.

"There those books are," the preacher said, pointing to a section of the homemade shelves that filled one wall of the room. "Thirty-two books all told. Good books"—he eyed them—"I keep them together there on that shelf." His eyes squinted, gazing at them. "I've no mind to forget what they signify. Think of it, a man meanin' good, or else he'd sure not have set a slave free worth as much as I was. Yet not able to bring himself to let me have books that I wanted so bad. Not while his own eyes could look on it. He had to wait till they closed in death. I don't get to read my books a heap, got no time. But they are mine. I like to own them."

The preacher looked at Eli and smiled. Eli spoke.

"Old master's grandchildren brought me a schoolbook. Carrie showed me the letters. I can count a little bit. She taught me to write my name. Nobody knows"—his shyness had fallen away—"except ma and pa. And Aunt Josie. And she used to give the little black children a slap"—it tickled him, thinking of that—"tell them to mind their own business, if they asked me what I was doin'. I hid the schoolbook Carrie gave me when she was through with it. I've still got it hid away. Ain't no need to get it out, I know it off by heart."

"All right, Eli," the preacher said, turning to a shelf and taking a thin little book in his hand. "We'll start you right from there."

Eli did not tire of books. Let him have a book at home, he would hardly want to lay it down; or have some sums, and his stiff fingers worked at them till they were done. Once upon a time he had begged to learn chores, now these were usually neglected. He found it hard to get about. However, let it be his book he wanted and nobody near to fetch it for him, Eli would bump down off the chair made low for him by sawed-off legs. Sitting on the boards, he used the wall, or his parents' bed, or pushed against the floor, swishing his legs from side to side till he had made his way to his goal. And when his folks came home, they were more than apt to find him on the floor reading near his book's hiding place.

This was good. But there was another side to Eli's reading that he began to feel dread about. As a slave boy, he had hid his little book, and kept to himself his forbidden knowledge. Since his lessons had begun he had taken secrecy for granted. It was his mother's habit to fetch the book he needed from the preacher's house. One occasion came when she asked Zeke to do it. "Fetch it, Zeke. Slip it inside your shirt. Ain't nobody goin' to notice."

"Me?" said Zeke. "Get whipped for it? They take me to the jail, thrash me, maybe even shut me up there?" When he returned home again that night he said to Sarah, "It's bad, what you do. You all got to take more care."

Now it was with apprehension that Eli, before his lesson, saw the preacher pull the street blinds and close the hall door. Or saw his mother tuck a book inside her ample shirtwaist. "Ma, don't. It shows!" Or slip the book in his cart beneath his shawl, while he tugged at her arm to make her stop, till she would grow impatient. "Listen, child, won't nobody, not even mean white folks, go a-liftin' up a shawl from a crippled boy's legs."

Protracted meeting time came late in August. On Wednesday nights the preacher held special meetings for prayer. Zeke and his family were on the road late one Wednesday, returning to their home from the preacher's store. Behind them lay the dark village streets, ahead the mile of road between them and home, only stars lighted their way.

Sarah and Sol, walking behind, could heard the bumping of Eli's cart where Zeke trudged before them in the dark. Sarah had just called out to Zeke to wait a minute while they caught up, when on

the road they heard horses, and presently the sound of easy, quiet-speaking voices.

The horses stopped. A man called, "Hey over there, whose niggers are you?"

Sarah hurried to Eli's side, he felt her bending down, heard her whisper, "Patrollers!"—and felt her hand reach in beside him, snatching the book the preacher had put there. Eli made out the shadows of man and beast across the road, horses moving restlessly.

One man said loudly to them, "Show us your passes, quick about it!"

Zeke stammered, finding his voice, "No, sir. We are free colored, me and my wife and two little boys."

"I don't believe you," the other man called from his horse. "Get out your papers."

They could hear Zeke feeling around in his breeches pocket, muttering, "Yes, sir, I got them right here." One patrol said to the other, "I forgot to take a torch." Both men dismounted.

Sarah muttered, "Hasten, Zeke!"

Eli was straining his ears to the sound of his father's hand patting his pocket, feeling his clothes, when his mother drew in a sharp breath, hissing, "Zeke, your other breeches!" That was it, his others that he had changed from because of a jagged hole that Eli himself had noticed as they started out of their door.

"I'm powerful sorry, master." Zeke's tone was low and humble. "I reckon I've gone and left that paper in my other pantaloons."

The patrols began to mutter. One said aloud, "I don't believe a word you say." And the other, "You'd best tell us the truth, tell us who your master is." The first man exclaimed, "We'll have to take you all to jail—being out this way without passes!"

Eli hardly had time to hear the pounding of his heart, when his mother's voice sounded loud and clear.

"Mister"—the boy felt her arm tighten on him—"my name is Sarah Hill. This is my husband, Zeke Hill, he's a carpenter. We used to belong on the old Hill place till we bought ourselves last Christmas time. These here are our two boys, one of them a cripple so he can't walk, he's ridin' in a little cart. Yes, sir," Sarah said, "a lot of people in the town can tell you we're free colored people. Upon honor, we've got our papers back at our cabin; it's a short piece down the road. Mister, if you'd come with us, we could show you."

"This black woman needs to learn her manners," one patrol said gruffly, and asked them, "You say you have a crippled boy in a cart?"

"Yes, sir, mister, he's right here."

One of the patrols walked over to them, lighting a match to see better. The match went out, but he reached in and felt around for Eli's legs, brushing his hand up and down the crooked limbs. Eli neither moved nor breathed.

The man spat as he turned away. "It's a fact, he's crippled. I've seen him lots of times. His pa's a free darkie, carpentered for a man I know."

Not until the horsemen were far down the road did any of them move or make a sound, except once there was a retching noise. Sarah was the one to pick up the wagon handle.

"Ma," Sol said. "Eli's throwed up."

"I know it," Sarah answered, and said to Zeke, "I'll pull awhile."

"What's the matter, Eli?" Sol said.

"Leave him be," Sarah said gruffly. "It's enough to scare anybody."

"I hate them," Eli choked. "Layin' their dirty hands on me . . ."

Hardly were they in their door when Sarah blazed out, "Zeke, you don't have to let white men wipe up the ground with you."

"You did wrong," Zeke said bitterly. "You heard what the white man said. You're too bold, Sarah, you'll get us into bad trouble."

"I won't let them rub me in the dirt!"

"By God, Sarah, I'll not have you give Sol and Eli notions contrary to their situation. I know white folks. We mightn't like the way things be, but we can't help it."

"You—you make me sick! Actin' humble when a white man elbows you. 'Thank'y, sir. Yes, *master*.' You let him push you right off the sidewalk. I won't have my boys feel so."

"They dast feel no other way," their father's voice sounded dreary. "You know it, Sarah, well as I do. They've got to do exactly like I say."

"Zeke!" She was silent a moment. "If I have my way, my children won't feel trampled on. Nobody—hear me?—nobody on this green earth has the right to do that to them."

"I don't want to be trampled on!" Sol said shrilly.

"Sol Hill!" his mother whirled on him. "You mind your manners, don't talk back to your pa!"

"Why don't we hush?" Eli wailed. "Why don't we stop talkin' this way?"

The room had been dark up to now, only the glow from the coals they had cooked on giving any light at all, but outside the moon had risen and cast a beam through the open door. Zeke took his heavy way across the floor. Using a splinter held in the coals, he lit the candles.

"I've decided"—Zeke's tone was flat and dispirited—"that Eli has got to quit his lessons. It ain't safe. Look at tonight."

"No!" said Sarah. She jerked out the book hidden inside her shirt-waist. "No, Zeke! He's got the right, they can't stop him!"

"I won't allow it," Zeke repeated.

"I won't be stopped, Zeke," Sarah said. "No matter what, the preacher being willin', Eli is goin' to learn to read as good as anybody. What's more, Zeke, I won't have you scarin' Eli." She swung around, speaking to her son, "Don't you dast let me catch you gettin' behind on your lessons. Hear me, Eli?"

"Hear me, Eli," went on ringing in his ears. Not from anything they said. Of course Zeke's dark moroseness overcast each new day. So did Sarah's hearty cheerful manner. Even to her giving in with, "All right, Zeke," to his, No, they weren't going at night to prayer meeting, just to preaching on Sundays in the broad light of day.

It was true that in one way Sarah acted differently. Now she herself sought Eli's hiding places, bringing out his books. With a new look on her face, not unkind, but not soft or tender either, she would stand over him. Sullenly Eli would begin to turn the pages. Only then did Sarah touch him in a swift caressing way. Not that Eli seemed to want it. Now he almost drew away.

She had no right to try to make him, his thoughts said; if he wanted to, that was his business; he didn't have to.

However, his resentment burned more against his stepfather. Let Zeke, coming home, cast his gloomy eyes at the lesson book or writing things, panic almost seized Eli. He would not stop, his hot thoughts cried; he would not give up his books. They were all he had to make himself anything. Whites had no right to stop him—it wasn't fair—they had no right.

Ira Lilly was a Clayville merchant. Eli had passed his store numerous times, and read the sign, "Merchandise, Prop. Ira Lilly," and

knew that Lilly was no ordinary merchant. He was the slave trader, this Eli had learned, though he was not sure when or where he got his knowledge. He knew that they never set foot in Lilly's store, and that he himself disliked Vine Street, or if they could not avoid it, hoped they would take the opposite side.

Eli knew Ira Lilly by sight. The man had often passed their place, sitting high on the seat of his big heavy wagon, driving a pair of strong slick mules. Lilly had a stocky build, and a red cheerful face, and would slap the reins and whistle to himself, or shout at his team as he rode past. Sometimes Lilly's wagon was empty. But then again it was often full, and always of black people, looking limp and crowded, and swaying a little to the wagon's heavy roll.

Once Sarah launched into tales of Ira Lilly (Eli remembered her sarcastic tone), of how only lately he had turned to slaving, when his store had failed under ugly circumstances. Lilly's wife's father had had to step in and pull his son-in-law out of bad trouble, whereupon the two men had gone into business, with Lilly taking up the slave trader end. White people, so folks said, distrusted Ira Lilly, and would not accept a paper signed by him alone. Lilly had to put down old Asa Brown's name to show that Brown would pay all his debts.

One morning Eli saw Ira Lilly's wagon pulling down the road, headed toward town. And he saw huddled on the floor a lone black woman. As the wagon drew near, Lilly shouted "Whoa!" and made his way hurriedly up to their door.

Sarah and Zeke were inside the place, and Sol out back at the well.

Lilly said to Eli, "Boy, your ma around?"

Sarah came directly to the door. Eli never forgot his mother's look as she saw who the man was asking for her.

"Gimme a cup o' water, will you? I got a sick nigger outside in my wagon."

Eli could hear the poor woman's groans.

Afterward Sarah said she almost could not do it—put her cup in the hands of that man, except her pity for the woman overcame her repugnance.

Later in the day they were on the country road leading from the village, coming home, Zeke pulling Eli's wagon, and Sarah walking

by his side. Eli suddenly broke the silence, his voice louder than he meant it to be.

"Pa," he said, "why can't that woman Lilly had buy herself like we did?"

"Hush, Eli!" Zeke stopped in his tracks. Quickly he cast his eyes all around, and looked at Sarah. Slaves were hoeing in the field they passed, but hardly near enough to hear, not above the shout of their black driver, "Git a move on, niggers! God damn you, git to hoein'!"

Zeke's tone sounded low and ugly. "Don't you dast talk that way Eli. She can't do it, that's why. Don't you dast let anybody ever hear you ask such a thing. God A'mighty, if you weren't lame, I'd give you such a thrashin' . . ."

"Zeke!" Sarah stopped him.

Nothing further was said till they reached home. Zeke's face remained morose. Sarah did not unbend.

"Pa!" Eli burst out when they were inside, "if we don't pay, could Master Rob call in the trader?"

"That's plain foolish!" Sarah cried.

"Could he?" Eli wailed. "They took my own pa. I want to know. Could he, pa?"

"I don't know," Zeke spoke roughly. "I don't know what Master Rob could do."

This first summer of freedom Eli turned thirteen. He now was eyeing Sol with a good deal of envy, for Sol, though only ten, was big for his age, and was playing with big boys, and with little Emmy Wade, the free colored barber's daughter. Whenever he was near her, Eli's eyes followed Emmy, and his mind began to dwell on boys and girls. Sometimes old memories, flowing back from the quarters, would stir him strangely: words, nudges, motions, laughter, private talk of boys of his age about who they had seen at love-making, and their own tries at little girls. Even to a time before he was crippled, of coming on lovers in the woods, black boy and girl in happy oblivion. Now he was remembering all such things, and they added to his feeling of restless discontent.

As mischance would have it, something happened to further aggravate it. Zeke was hauling Eli, his head down, pulling sluggishly. Their steps were turned toward home. Heat beat up from

the sidewalk, swirls of gritty dust rose. They passed a wide gateway. Far up an avenue of oaks, cool and distant, stood a big white house spreading out. Eli's eyes caught the sight, dwelling on it, when something came between him and the pleasant vista. Out from behind a high privet hedge darted the figure of a little black girl, running hard across the grass, onto the drive, and up toward the house. Not a sound came from her, although as she flew by Eli caught the look on her face. A new noise back of him made him twist his head around—for one look before he jerked his eyes away.

Wildly turbulent thoughts possessed him, his heart thumped in his chest, his throat ached. Words that he could not speak were choking him: dirty coward—son-of-a-bitch—get his hands diggin' into those nasty jeering eyes—white-livered cur . . .

That one look had shown him the white boy, one near his own age, walking out from behind the hedge, carelessly putting his clothes in order. Hot tears filled Eli's eyes. He brushed them furiously away, all the while anxiously watching the back of his father's head.

Zeke plodded on as before, his eyes still downcast, although as told by the bumping of the wagon, he had certainly quickened his pace.

Both were silent all the way home. Back again in their cabin, Zeke still said nothing, but having put Eli in his chair, he took the hoe from the boys' sleeping-shed and went outside. Presently through the wide open back door Eli could see his father bend to the hilling of their rows of corn.

Sarah was damping down her clothes. The boy opened his mouth to speak, even said, "Ma . . .," but closed it again. Then he asked her for his book, demanded it in an angry way.

"Eli," his mother said, "what has come over you?" She jerked up the mattress, opened her chest. "No, listen child, I've got this wash to finish. I can't run around waitin' on you for the things you can do yourself. Just you work yourself across the floor and look for your book. I can't find it. What's more"—Sarah's hands slapped the sheet as she sprinkled—"why you've got to keep hidin' it different places, I don't see. White people ain't goin' to come here a-spyin'"

"I hate white people!" Eli muttered.

Not till bedtime, and everything still, and Eli himself drifting off, did the recollection that had hovered, nagging at him, begin to

come, heralded by the sense of something threatening trying to enter. . . .

Josie's cabin. She at the big house—gone somewhere. Cool in the shade of the big oak tree, the honeysuckle-scented air warm and sweet. Shrill cries, shrill laughter, "Can't catch me . . .," of the little slave children. Such were the pictures drifting back. When suddenly he was wide awake. Saw himself duck his face in his hands, hiding from a noisy yellowjacket zooming close around his ears—hearing as he did that other cry. It brought his hands down quickly from his eyes, made him stare where high weeds tossed and swayed out back of Josie's place. Now the memory began to fade. Not, however, until he heard little black Alice scream again, "Git off me! I'll tell. . . ." And saw the sight of her passing him, running down the quarters road. Saw as well—perhaps grinning, the face was somewhat blurred—young Tom, old master's grandson, strapping and strong, walking toward him, heard his tone, "Don't you go tattletaling, nigger."

That old door in his mind swung shut before he had realized it. Except that he felt relief when his thoughts began to drift, taking up a story that he had often told himself, a continuing tale. Emmy Wade. Eli now found it beginning in the way it usually did. He and Emmy out walking through a pasture like the one he used to know. He not lame, of course, something magical had healed his legs. He was the first to hear the roar, see the bull snort, make its rush. Quicker than a flash, nor feeling even a quiver of fear, he . . .

However, this night his story took a different turn. Over the fence and into the field he saw a white boy come strutting toward him. Before they knew what was happening, the boy reached out, snatching at Emmy. Emmy dodged, began to run, the jeering white boy at her heels. Eli heard Emmy scream. In his feet, the feeling of wings, he sped after them. There!—he was catching up, reaching, snatching. Joy or something coursed through him, seeing the fear on the hateful white face. He swung his fist back, and felt its thud against pallid flesh. Now at last he could turn and see the proud look on little Emmy's face. . . . Soon thereafter Eli drifted off into heavy, satisfied sleep.

Eli tried not to think of his worries. . . . The slave trader. Being left alone at night. Great claps of thunder, fear lest the lightning strike.

Patrollers. Not paying Master Rob. If his parents died, what would become of him? Going to jail for learning to read. Going to hell for thinking of lust. One trouble was, he had little to divert him. Sol could go fishing, play with other boys, roam the woods, race across fields, hoe people's gardens and do other chores. Eli could do nothing but sit, sit and brood, and this was a burden. He felt it especially in these days when within he was restless, and lots of times afraid, and feeling how unfair things were.

The preacher more than once had read him those words, *God called unto him . . . and said, Moses, Moses. . . . And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters. . . . And I am come down to deliver them. . . . Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh. . . . And afterwards Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh. . . . Let my people go.*

Eli one day put his thoughts before his mother.

"Ma, why were black people made slaves? When are they goin' to be free? Did they sin against the Lord?"

"Eli!" Sarah's iron raced across the sheet. "You ought to ask the preacher, child. I don't know Scripture enough."

"Maybe," said Eli, "if we hadn't been slaves, I wouldn't have had to be lame."

"Eli," Sarah said, "that ain't sensible. Slaves or free wouldn't have mattered. Ain't white children sometimes crippled? No, child, we just can't understand the mysterious ways of the Lord. Why," she said, and her iron paused, "maybe the Lord is tryin' you. Maybe he has got some work in store. Maybe he wants to see if you can be a man like your pa was, even though you are afflicted. Anyhow, you ask the preacher, child. He's the one to know such things. I'm just an ignorant woman."

"I want to know why are black people slaves. Why, ma?"

Sarah put her iron on the hearth to heat and sat in her rocker fanning herself.

"How can I know, child? White people do it. But I don't believe—nobody can make me—that it's any fault of ours. Why would the Lord be mad at us? I never heard that we did wrong in Africa, any more than do any humans. Look at your own pa. Was it any fault of his that he was picked up as a little boy there, put on a ship, and

made to come to this land? Would any say a little boy had done a sin that he should be brought over here to toil in slavery? And did he sin in slavery?—when all he did was what any man would want to do, wantin’ to go free the way he did. He wouldn’t knuckle down to them, wouldn’t scrape and bend, he kept tryin’ to run away. Was that bad? That’s the only reason he was sold, sent away, somewhere we had no notion of. Maybe alive, maybe dead, and we don’t know. . . . Maybe your pa was too bold for his own good. I don’t say he couldn’t have taken more care, but I do say, it was right for him to want to be free, try to be, even to runnin’ away.”

“Ma, did the slave trader take pa away?”

“Not Ira Lilly, honey. It was another man.”

“Whites do wrong, don’t they, ma?”

“It’s my belief whites do wrong every day.”

“Then why don’t the Lord punish them? He heard the cry of the children of Israel. Why don’t He hear black people pray?”

“Eli, you do ask such outlandish things. How would I know? Another thing, if it wasn’t for your step-pa, where’d you be, please tell me? A slave boy right now, and me a slave woman. He kept his patience all those years, toiled and labored after dark, did as he was told, and here we are. Don’t you and Sol dast forget such a thing!”

It may have been his feeling of deep discontent, or it may have been chance that brought it about, he would never know, though Eli remembered the day and circumstances; the last detail remained distinct.

His people were hoeing their sweet potato patch, and Eli was picking wildflowers in the field. At a distance he saw a fresh lot that beckoned. In angry impatience he snatched up a stick that turned out to be rotten and crooked so that it broke at his touch. He searched out another, took hold with two hands, and began to pull and pry and push.

Zeke glanced up. “Look, ma,” he called, and said, “Eli, you wait, I’ll make you a good prize-stick.”

After sundown they sat on the doorstep, Zeke with a stick he had cut in the woods. With his jackknife Zeke whittled and pruned and smoothed to a finish the fresh-cut wood. Sarah kept saying, “It’s

like a boughten thing,” and Sol exclaimed at how smooth it was becoming.

When it was done Zeke lifted Eli. “Come on, son.” Zeke set him on the ground, on his chair, on his bed, in his cart, on the floor. “Try this,” he would say, and Eli would try. He was drenched with sweat, tired enough to drop, but when his father told him, “Try,” he seemed to find it in himself to put forth effort.

“That’s it, son!” at last Zeke said. “That prize-stick’ll make your arms strong, your back’ll get to be good as mine. Just you keep a-tryin’”

The new prize-stick had a curious effect. Eli came to treat it as inseparable from himself, and with it in his hands he wore a different look—his eyes grew brighter, and his mouth more contented. He began to think of things that he would like to do, especially his wish to earn a little money. Sol was able to, a nickel now and then, and Sol, he kept saying, was younger than himself. All Sarah could suggest were chores that helped her, such as scrubbing the frying pan, or damping down her wash. Zeke was the one who came to Eli’s rescue. He began to teach Eli how to weave the rush seats for chairs and stools that he made to sell, and how to give the wood a handsome finish. This finishing of a piece Eli came to like best, as the feel of the wood took on a nice smoothness, and took on a sheen, from the labor of his hands. It was as though he himself had wrought a change in the wood, and he liked the feeling. When the pieces were sold, Eli got his share.

Those Saturday nights when his folks brought home their wages, Zeke and Sarah theirs, and even Sol a few nickels, Eli had his coins to add. He insisted that his must also go into their store hidden beneath the loose hearthstone. This was the money that would some day pay their debt owing for him and for Zeke’s tools.

So went Eli’s first year of freedom, till the second summer came, bringing close the time when they were due to pay their debt. Two years, the paper had allowed. Master Rob had told Zeke, “I’m not pushin’ you unduly. It’s for your own good to feel a time limit.” Now the time was drawing near. Each Saturday night Eli would count their savings (he had learned to count well, and Zeke depended on it), so that he knew precisely how much they lacked, and he was

growing anxious at the incomplete sum. Nor did Zeke's remark help him, when he said, "We can't pay what we ain't got. I can do no better, Eli."

That midsummer Eli became ill with an ugly hot fever and racking cough. When Sarah sensed that his trouble was severe, she insisted to Zeke that they have Dr. Campbell. Eli, lying sick on his parents' bed, saw Zeke dig out the loose hearthstone. He began to wail, "Don't take that money, pa, not any of that money. I don't need a doctor. We ain't got enough."

Perhaps Eli's grieving was too much for Zeke, or else his own worry got the best of him. On the day the doctor said, "The boy is on the mend," without a word to Sarah, Zeke took his way to town.

When Zeke returned home it was high noon.

"What you doin' home this time o' day?" Sarah asked indifferently, and hardly looking up from her ironing board. She was worn out from her nursing of Eli.

Eli was listless, sitting propped up in bed. He scarcely spoke when his father entered.

It was Sol who noticed. He came in from the well, fetching a pail of water for his mother.

"You home, pa?" he said curiously, exclaiming, "pa what happened?"

Zeke gave his slow, shy smile.

"Zeke!" Sarah was all attention now. "Something's happened!"

"Kind of," Zeke said. He dropped his money sack on Eli's lap.

Sarah snatched it up. "What you got here?"

"What's he got, ma?" Eli said, his voice quivering.

Sarah jerked the strings. Money began to pour out onto the bed.

"Count it, son!" Zeke whispered. "Count it! It's enough!"

"Pa!" Eli's trembling hands began to count the money. "Are we all paid for, pa? Am I really paid for?"

"Goin' to be: Come this time tomorrow! Yes sir-ee, goin' to be!"

"Glo—ry! Glory!" Sarah hugged Zeke, and hugged Eli, and caught Sol's hands, while Sol gave a shout. Methodist or not, it little mattered: the Good Book says, "There's a time to dance." Sarah, holding tight Sol's two hands, began to swing and sway around the room. She stopped suddenly.

"How, Zeke? Where'd you get the money?"

"Borrowed it," Zeke told her. "Mr. John Temple lent it to me."

"You signed him a paper? Then we're still owin'?"

"He won't let me sign no paper! But I'll pay. He says he's a-trustin' me. I'll pay soon."

"Zeke," said Sarah. "What makes us better off? Ain't we still beholden? You answer me that."

"He was ready to befriend us"—Zeke's tone was stubborn "when Master Rob would have sold us off."

"Pa," began Eli, "ain't I paid for yet? I don't want any white man over me, not Mr. John Temple, not anybody. . . ."

"Ain't nobody!" Sarah said gruffly. "You're paid for, honey, you will be tomorrow. All it is, we owe this white man money, but it don't give him any say-so about you. Eli, you're a free boy! You hear that? You're free! Get that into your head, child!"

So he was paid for. Night after night Eli thought of it the last thing, let the blissful feeling take hold, and fell asleep as if to a tune. Yet he never thought of it in after years without another feeling intruding itself, an uneasiness that seemed inappropriate, till he remembered and recaptured what had happened that time.

He was dropping off to sleep on a hot August night—hot as a Carolina August can be—murky and close, when far away hounds began to bay, though Eli, listening as the dogs drew nearer, thought nothing of them, it merely drifting through his head, "Hunters after 'possum tonight." (Ever afterward, and no matter how he argued with himself, it made Eli shiver when hounds started baying in the night.)

They came nearer, then the clatter of horses' hooves. Then fists pounding on the door.

Sol was hissing in Eli's ear, "What is it?"

They heard loud voices shouting at their father, heavy feet tramping in the room, a confusion, men calling gruffly, "Who are you?" "Show your papers!" "Fetch a lightwood knot!"

Zeke's deep, rumbling words sounded. "No, sir, no mister. Nobody ain't come near here."

Sarah was telling them, "Before God, I swear nobody. . . ."

Feet tramped around the floor, voices sounded. "Look under that bed there." "Go look in that shed." From outside came the noise of horses stamping, dogs whining, men complaining of the heat.

The children had nothing over them, naked but for their drawers. Eli longed to have his shawl to pull up over his head, shut out the light of that torch coming through the door at them, those huge shadowy forms of white men. Close his eyes tight though he did, he could feel the men bend down peering at Sol and himself, and feel and smell the hot, smoky lightwood knot. One of them even got down to poke around under their planks. Eli's nose caught the odor of the white man's sweaty body.

Nothing more, except a man saying harshly, "If he comes, don't you dast. . . ." And Zeke answering, "No, master, I never would." Very soon the hounds were baying again, farther and farther away.

Long after Sol had fallen asleep, Eli remained wakeful and restless. He heard the murmur of his parents' voices quiet down, presently his father's loud breathing turn to a snore. At every noise that came from the outside, whether a horseman on the road, somebody's dog barking in the night, or even the scrabble of mice's feet across the roof, he lay tense and still. Drowsiness finally dampened down his worry. As his mind drifted off the words came, and they returned to him many times in succeeding months and even years, Maybe the Lord will send a plague. . . .

4

No plague came to interrupt the common run of their days. Nothing but rain falling on the crops when not needed, occasionally blights or bugs on the tender growing things. For the most part, hot summer sun beating down, drawing the corn higher by the minute, dropping the blossoms and swelling the bolls hanging on the cotton.

Eli watched that second summer go, as it seemed more than ever a dreamy boy. Hour by hour he would sit outside and fill his thoughts with all that passed. Ox teams taking their slow meandering way on the road. Two-mule teams moving at a steadier gait. Sometimes elegant carriages going by, pulled by a pair of fine matched horses, a black coachman holding the reins. Or men riding on horseback, some well dressed, some in ordinary farmers' clothes. Besides these were people trudging by, folk on their two feet who hardly ever rode, mostly black people. Some of them, noticing Eli's badly crippled legs, would even call out to him, saying, "Howdy, boy."

He could sit there two or three hours at a stretch, and all the sounds he ever heard were country sounds. Birds chirping now and then in the bushes, dog far off somewhere in the field yelping at a rabbit he was chasing, breeze blowing through the broom straw near the cabin door so he could hardly hear the swish-swish it made unless he had sharp ears. He might hear his mother out back hoeing their potato patch, hear the hoe striking, hear her singing very low. And once in a while, that grind of wheels in the big road moving so slowly, he knew the oxen were pulling before he looked at them.

Eli had always told himself stories, and he continued to, although with a different turn. He remembered having done it this particular summer, for he had a special landmark, a story that came to him that he never forgot, even to the time and place he made it up.

Sarah was trundling him on the road that ran directly by the camp meeting ground of the white Methodists. Weekday morning though it was, August had come and protracted meeting was in full

swing. The grove was crowded with teams, and over in the distance through the trees could be seen the white throng. Long before they drew near they could hear the wail of songs, even to the words of hymns, voices singing more like a moan than tunefully, "O Lamb of God. . . ." And in a quick, strident shout, the preacher's voice, borne on the sultry, heat-laden air, "Repent, repent, lest you burn to a—l—l eternity!"

His mother pulled Eli past. Revival sounds grew faint and far-away, then faded out. But not the feelings stirring the boy. Sque—ak, Sque—ak, sounded his wooden cart-wheels. Sarah plodded, bending her back; she said nothing, nor did Eli.

A picture floated into his head. His mind's eye saw a huge, indistinct throng moving down a turnpike, dark people, no whites anywhere, the preacher at their head. The notion drifted in, just like Moses, leading them to somewhere. Faintly he began to hear singing, gradually it came clear. He saw Preacher Baldwin's long legs striding out in the lead, saw him listen, smile, raise his great hand, and heard his tones peal forth, ". . . this is the day of Jubilee."

(Eli's mother called back something. He heard, and murmured in reply, although his mind was not on her.)

Close behind the preacher he now saw his own folks. There they tramped, his ma's face especially bright and clear, such a wonderful look on it, and behind them thousands of people, way back yonder, far as his eyes could reach. And where was he? He hadn't seen himself, although he must be somewhere, he was seeing everything.

The picture now jumped ahead. All were gathered in an oak grove, a big roomy place. They had halted, everybody went about settling themselves. He saw food begin to be passed, almost the smell of it came to his nostrils. Flour bread and fried fish, peaches and grapes, pound cake, hot coffee. His own mother was managing the business. He could see her moving around from one cluster to another, laughing and exchanging remarks, saying hospitably, "There's plenty, don't go a-stintin' yourselves." The people ate their fill, then some went about picking up the leftovers, filling baskets.

A trumpet blast sounded in his ears, came out of the blue, and made his spine tingle. He saw a wooden platform (like the Methodists'

camp ground, saw the preacher climb up on it and look on that vast throng. Then he saw himself. Surely like himself. Face recognizable, though it was a young man. Standing—yes, standing—his body upright. A whole man upright on his own strong legs.

He heard the preacher's voice suddenly boom forth. People at the furthest edge of the throng grew still. "Listen to me!" The grove so quiet. "The Lord has commanded me, 'Preacher, lead my people out! Lead them to the Promised Land! And He's told me something further.'" The preacher turned around—his face kind of shone—Eli knew the look—he wore a smile. People glued their eyes on him. He stretched forth his big strong arm, finger pointing—pointing toward the young man standing by his side. "He's sent a man of learnin' to help me. He's laid his hand on Eli Hill!" Eli heard a great clapping, and a shout go up, and heard trumpets blare. . . .

(His eyes might be open while his mother trundled him, yet still he saw nothing of the places they passed, or heard his cart-wheels squeak, or heard his mother humming as she pulled his wagon.)

And now their own revival drew near. Eli felt himself growing curiously excited. He found the notion seeking him out, hardly louder than a whisper, and remaining uncompleted, Maybe if he needed the Lord's call. . . .

The first night or two he felt disappointment. He felt restraint, and was conscious of his legs. He was conscious that the meeting was held in the store, with bins pushed back and goods on the shelves. He noticed the old table that served as a pulpit, and how hot and crowded he felt on the bench, how many had to stand and how their feet shuffled, how the babies fretted, how the lamps smoked and flickered. To be sure he saw the aisle that the deacons kept clear, leaving room aplenty so that sinners could walk, and he saw a few sinners rise and tread the aisle. He remained unstirred, a gloomy listless boy. As they trundled home, he was irritable and glum.

About mid-week a change came as Eli looked at that bare room. It was no longer a dim-lit place, murky and hot, but filled with a glowing hazy light. He trembled at the look on the preacher's face, and he seemed to hear a trumpet note in his voice.

He heard the preacher cry, "Who's on the Lord's side? Who but the saved?"

"Glory be to Almighty God!" burst forth from the mourners' bench.

"Yes"—"Yes"—"Praise God"—low, high, shrill, deep, cries sounded on every hand.

Now the invitation song poured forth,

I know the Lord's laid his hands on me

Je—sus washed my sins a—way

I know the Lord's laid his hands on me.

O I know the Lor—d, I know the Lor—d. . . .

The preacher called to the people to come. Saved ones sounded out their cries. Two or three more saved walked up the aisle—"Glory!" "Saved!"

Eli's mother was standing beside him, head uplifted, as she took the singing lead,

My Lord's done just what he said,

(All swinging in) . . . laid his hands on me.

Healed the sick and rais'd the dead,

I know the Lord's . . .

She felt Eli tug at her skirt, pull her hand. Not losing a note she let her eyes drop to his uplifted face, and it came over her what Eli meant. She leaned to where Zeke stood against the wall; she pulled at his arm and pointed down at Eli, and she nodded her head up toward the front. Her eyes shone, while her voice rang out, clearer and louder even than it had before.

Solemnly Zeke lifted Eli, carrying him the way a child is carried, those few steps to the mourners' bench. He sat the boy there and went back to his place. Eli wished that he could kneel like the other sinners did.

Peter Baldwin stopped the song, raised his hand and brought it to an end, and rested his other hand on the shoulder of the boy, and closed his eyes, and spoke aloud prayer. He praised the Lord for the moving of his spirit, for his care of every lamb of the fold, never one lost, that he didn't grieve, or one found that he didn't rejoice. "Lord!" he whispered in a way that carried to every ear in the room, "we are feeble instruments for doin' thy will. But what is required, just call on us, Lord. And thine be the glory. A—men!"

"A— men!" echoed the crowd.

"A—men!" Sarah whispered.

That night the lame boy lay on his bed, tense as if he waited for something. Presently his lips moved forming words, "Now, Lord. Won't you . . . heal my legs?"

Not for a day did he cease to say it, waking in the morning, going to sleep. At his lesson-time the Saturday after the revival ended, he blurted out, "Preacher, how can I be received into the church when I ain't sure that I'm converted?"

Peter Baldwin put the books aside.

"I don't feel right toward the Lord!" Eli cried. "Why's he got to do to me what he's done?"

"Tell me the trouble," Peter Baldwin said.

Eli sat staring at his legs, trying to hide the tears smarting in his eyes.

"Could you tell me, Eli?"

"I don't know," the boy murmured.

"Try," said the preacher.

"I was wrong to think the Lord called."

"No," said the preacher, gazing down at the boy's bowed head. "No, Eli, you weren't wrong."

"Then why don't He do it?" Eli burst out. "I asked the Lord to heal my legs, I want to walk! I asked him to work a miracle. . . . I've waited, I've prayed. They're no better. Why?"

Sitting still, and looking greatly puzzled, the preacher hesitated awhile. "Somehow or other . . . I reckon we've led you to think something that can't be."

"You mean"—lifting a stormy face—"I've got to know I never can walk in my whole life?"

"Son," Peter Baldwin tried to hold Eli's eyes, "I wish you could walk, I know how much you want to. I mean that you'll have to accustom yourself to your legs the way they are. But listen, Eli"—

"I don't want to be a cripple!"

"I don't blame you."

"And that ain't all. Why does the Lord do what He does? Makes me a cripple. I ain't good, but I ain't bad. Makes black people slaves. Lets white people do bad things, even to wantin' to stop my lessons.

All I've got or ever can have is some learnin'. Where's God? Why don't He do something?"

"Eli," Baldwin was frowning. "You can't act like that. The Lord don't mean you to take on so. Don't ask the Lord to make you walk——"

"The Bible says He does, you read it to me."

"Ask Him to make you whole, make a whole man out of you. That's what the Lord used to say to cripples. Eli——"

"What if I've got to quit my lessons? Why does He favor whites over us? What have black people done to make Him mad?"

The preacher, looking baffled, picked up his Bible and began to turn the pages, as though he searched out something.

"Son, I want you to pay attention to me. We can't hold the Almighty accountable for the wickedness of man. Evil is loose in the world. It's Satan that makes men call the bad things they do the will of the Almighty. Eli," and he dropped his voice, "it weren't the will of God that put black people into slavery. And someday, son, maybe not distant, it'll be wiped out, I know it will."

"Listen, Eli," Baldwin's fingers quickly turned the pages, "Listen what Scripture promises us—it's here—what I'm readin' is right here in Scripture. *After these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven saying, Alleluia . . . power unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments. . . .*

"It says more. *And I saw heaven opened. . . . In righteousness he will judge and make war. . . . He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

"Eli, this is in Scripture, too." And Eli, hearing, felt as though the words began to sing in him. "*And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. . . . And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.*"

The room seemed very quiet. The preacher's eyes were on a distant place. And Eli, though not understanding why, had felt his misery melt as he listened to the words that had moved him so strangely.

Presently Baldwin shook himself. Reaching in the drawer of his table, he held out a book to Eli.

“Here’s something I got for you, son. It will mark your coming to the Lord.”

“For me?” Eli whispered, taking the Bible the preacher held out.
“For me to *keep*?”

“For you to keep to your dyin’ day.”

“Here’s one book,” Sarah said, seeing what it was that Eli brought,
“that we won’t ever hide.”

5

Few free black people in that time of slavery realized the hope of ever owning land. However, it happened sometimes, so that to Zeke, and, as the years went by, more especially to Sol, it seemed that what other freedmen had done, perhaps they might also do.

Something besides their inner urge drove Zeke and Sol along. Times were disturbing. In the 1850s conditions grew worse. The fugitive slave law that was stirring up the country, and abolitionism along with it, sent waves of feeling all through Carolina. Newspapers were filled with the trouble. Occasionally Eli got to read the county paper. Slave-trouble rumors grew as common as weeds, no doubt helped along by the rash of escapes, quite a number of them in the upcountry. In Clay County there were many complaints. Sol would hear the rumors and tell Eli and his parents. It was being whispered by whites (to each other) that somebody in Clay, probably a freedman, was helping these fugitives to slip away. Sol once murmured the preacher's name, at which Sarah's face began to glow, but Eli stopped Sol with an angry gesture, muttering to him to keep his mouth shut.

Zeke and Sol, and sometimes Sarah, had for some time been meeting trouble. They had become accustomed to hostility, suspicious looks, ugly words, because they were free. They met these now more than ever—loud remarks on Clayville's streets. "Demoralizin' example—these free blacks, here side by side with our niggers," "Trouble will come," "We ought to ship them off." Some white people who formerly had hired them found they no longer needed their help. White artisans, who had long worked beside them, now became aroused by the fever of the times. Zeke and Sol found themselves more and more shut out from carpentering jobs. 1857 was the bad panic year, hard times were everywhere; and 1858, as Zeke's family found, proved to be little better.

On a late November evening in 1858, around Zeke's fireside they were holding a council. Eli was now in his mid-twenties,

and while of course his legs hung limp and useless, his shoulders had grown heavy and his chest had filled out. If he had held himself erect instead of slumping, he might have appeared almost a strong young man, especially since his manner was different; there were times when he asserted himself, as he was doing on this occasion.

Sol, now twenty-one, was stocky and strong, with a build much like his father's. Legs wide apart, he stood before the fire, back turned to it, facing the others.

"I say we ought to do it!" his tone was stubborn.

"We've got to talk it over," Eli said. "It won't do to go jumpin' into this."

"Sit down, Sol," Sarah said.

"No, ma, I don't want to sit!"

"You better sit, Sol," Eli said. "And you don't have to holler. We're ready to listen."

"It ain't that I try to overpersuade." Sol sat down on the bench. "It's right for me to want that farm. I've wanted one for years, and you all know it. Now we've got the chance."

"Maybe," said Zeke. "But I didn't like that Searles man much."

"I mayn't have seen him," Eli said. "But it don't sound right. Why would he stop free colored on the street and offer to sell a piece of land to them? Whites just don't act that way."

"He didn't, Eli. You're twistin' things. We just got to talkin', the way you can. He didn't offer. I asked."

"Well, now, Sol," Zeke said.

"Not really, pa. He acted unwillin'. All his talk about the land bein' high; he wouldn't sell to niggers; we couldn't make it pay. Why, he didn't sound anxious at all. Don't you remember, he was walkin' away, and I hollered at him, Could we go take a look? He don't care if we buy or not."

"That's what I mean," Eli said. "He was eggin' you on, Sol."

"Why don't you and Emmy Wade wed right now tomorrow—go right ahead?" Sarah said.

"And me not sure I'll have work tomorrow? How'd I bring home bread and meat? Right now half the time we all have to pinch, and scrape the bottom o' the barrel for enough. I s'pose we'd go live off her pa!"

"He's havin' his troubles," Zeke said. "White men he's shaved for these many years don't go near him now. They use the white barber."

"So I say, take Searles's offer!"

"Sol," Eli said. "If the house is fallin' in when he told you it was good, then the land might be poor, too poor to grow a crop on. Our years of savin' might be wasted."

"You don't want a farm—you with your books!"

"That's partly true."

"Readin' from daybreak to sundown, I reckon!"

"Sol!" said Sarah.

"I meant no harm, Eli. It's just that I know you'd rather stay here near the preacher's books. Though I'd have thought you'd read them all by now."

"I reckon I have," Eli said. "Two or three times, some of them. I do depend on them."

"We'd fetch 'em to you, I've told you that, it ain't as if we'd never come to town."

"Fifteen miles is a long way, Sol."

"Your mule has got to plow, Sol," Sarah said. "It's got to pull the wagon from the field, it's got to be saved up for work."

"My mule—I wish I had one."

"That's the other side," Eli almost smiled. "Don't you forget—I've got my eye on that mule and wagon. Once we get a farm I'm aimin' to ride like I've never been able to—and make firewood of my old cart. And I like country quiet. And seein' things grow. I ain't against livin' on a farm. But this Searles's place. . . ."

"Of course," Zeke said, "we can fix up the house. Me and Sol ain't carpenters for nothin'. We can put a new roof on the barn."

"That's it, that's it," Sol said. "And all the land can't be poor, that land out there ain't generally bad. Other farmers grow crops. I saw the fields when we went by."

"You don't know a lot about farmin' yet, Sol," Sarah said.

"I know it, ma. But I know a field o' cotton when I see it."

"Sol is right," Zeke said. "It's fair-to-middlin' land in that part. I talked to a farmer as we came along. It ain't bad, though it could be better. But any land we're able to buy is likely to be just about that way."

"You're for it, Zeke?" Sarah asked. "I want a farm, want it so bad I'm scared we'll be fooled. You say buy?"

"I'm both ways," Zeke said at last. Sol leaned forward waiting for his father. "If the times were better, I'd likely say, Wait. They bein' what they are. . . ."

"Say you're for it, pa!"

"I reckon, Sol."

"Well," said Sarah. "It's really you all's say-so. You saw the place. You all earn the bread and meat."

Sol let out a whoop.

"Hush!" said Sarah. "It must be near to midnight."

A fortnight later saw Zeke and Sol, and Eli in his cart, starting out in the morning, Sarah standing in their door, gaily, proudly waving them away. Zeke had insisted that Eli come. Sol could read and figure some, Eli long ago having taught him. But Eli was the one that his father counted on when it came to papers and such matters.

The county clerk said, "As to provin' the deed. . . ." He glanced at Zeke.

"It ain't necessary," George Searles, a heavy figure in countryman's clothes, interrupted. He glared at the clerk. "You've seen these niggers' free papers. My word's good as a bond."

The clerk shrugged, opening up his deed books. Eli pulled his father's head down and whispered in his ear. Zeke frowned. "Ask him," Eli murmured. Zeke shook his head.

"Mister!" Eli said. "Please, sir, what's meant, 'provin' the deed?"

"You'd ought to ask a lawyer," the clerk said gruffly. "Or ask your old master. Who'd you belong to?"

They answered nothing.

"Tend to your clerk's business," George Searles said gruffly.

"Well, it's your own look-out," the clerk turned away. "It's your own money."

"We could ask Judge Temple," Eli said.

"He knows you?" the clerk spoke.

"What're you insinuatint?" George Searles roared. "You dast doubt my word, you impudent, good for nothin' . . ."

"They've got a right, Searles," the clerk said. "It's nothin' at all out of the ordinary. If they want to go and ask the Judge, what's the harm? Leave them be. You all," he spoke to Zeke, "might find the

Judge in his chambers right now down the hall. ‘County Judge’ is on the door. Might go try—won’t do any harm.”

“The sale’s off!” Searles said. “I wouldn’t sell to these niggers. Free niggers are the curse of the country anyhow. Sale’s off!” But he did not leave.

“Must we, pa?” Sol murmured.

“Take me, pa,” Eli said.

When they returned, John Temple was with them, older-looking than his mid-thirties, his hair already graying. Sol, with Eli astride his back, and Zeke, stepped aside waiting for the judge to enter. Then Sol set Eli down on a chair.

“Mr. Searles,” said Temple, “is this the property that you foreclosed on Mr. Henry Sims? Isn’t there a question still about a clear deed?”

“The land’s mine and nobody else’s,” Searles said.

“If these darkies bought it from you, they’d find themselves up to their necks in litigation. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“I’ve got a right to sell, Judge. Nobody can stop me.”

“Maybe,” said Temple, “if you can find a buyer. But they’re under no obligation to buy.”

“They’ve done agreed,” Searles said. “I’ll go to court on it.”

“To pay their hard-earned savings for a property that’s been misrepresented? Searles, I’m advising these black men to leave this property alone, have nothing to do with it. Understand? Zeke, that’s my best advice. You’d better give up buying this place.”

“Yes, sir, Judge!” Eli said fervently. “We sure will.”

Zeke nodded. Poor dazed Sol said nothing at all. Searles stamped out of the room.

Looking at his watch, John Temple said, “Zeke, you know where my law office is? Right across the square, door is inside the hall.”

“Yes, sir, I been there.”

“Yes, yes. Now I haven’t got any time this week. Let me see. Say next Tuesday. You come to my law office around ten o’clock Tuesday morning. Wait if I’m not there.”

While they were still at a distance Sarah came waving, running down the road. Drawing near she called out excitedly, “You got it, got it?” Noticing by then the foreboding silence, she stopped a few yards away. “What’s wrong?”

Sol blurted out, "No, we ain't got nothin'." Hand over his mouth, he clamped his jaws.

"What's happened?" Sarah repeated, frowning heavily, then demanding, "Zeke, you got our money?"

Zeke silently pulled back his coat to show the money sack tied around his waist.

The next Tuesday while they waited outside Judge Temple's door, a white farmer sat waiting also; they assumed he was a farmer by his looks: muddy boots, homespun garments, bearded weathered face. The farmer presently was called inside, and he was still seated there when the Judge's serving man called them in.

Temple sat at his desk, hand stretched out toward the blaze.

"I asked Mr. Dumont here to come in. I think we've found a little farm for you."

"Sir?" Sol gasped.

"It's eight or nine miles out. In Sand Hollow district, out a few miles beyond my place. Mr. Dumont also lives in the district. He knows the farm."

"Yes, sir?" Sol whispered.

"About sixty or seventy acres, ain't it, Mr. Dumont? That's small. But you ought not to take on any more. The owner wants to move to Alabama. Thomas, his name?"

"Tompkins, Squire," Matt Dumont said. "It's nigh three miles from my place. Otherwise the crossroads store. He been aimin' to sell a good while."

"He's agreeable, then?"

"I told him what you said—that you'd stand responsible. He's a suspicious kind o' chap. Said he hadn't thought to sell to niggers."

"Judge, sir . . ." Sol began.

"Truth is, squire," Matt Dumont said, "Tompkins is a worthless white man. He's taken no care of his place or family either. He's let the house run down disgraceful."

"Please, sir!" Sol said. "Me and my pa are carpenters—we can do any needful fixin'."

"You can fix it all right," Dumont said. "I was just tellin' you. It's got two good rooms. Little barn and lean-to. Pigsty o' sorts. Good spring. That spring is really good, Squire, just needs a powerful cleanin' out. Nice branch runnin' off it, water your stock the year

round. Twenty-five, maybe thirty acres cultivated, mostly cotton. Woodlands are pine and blackjack. Got a little pasture land. A few acres won't grow nothing but sagebrush and cockleburs. It's the same on mine."

"Cultivated land fair?" asked Temple.

"Good as mine, Squire, if it's treated right. I don't mind showin' them how. Be glad to have a good carpenter in the district."

"Now the price. What'll Tompkins take?"

"I had to argue a little, Squire. Wanted more'n the place is worth. That no-count kind always does. Wanted to throw in his plow and wagon. And sell his mule. Mule ain't worth the fodder it'd eat. They'll have to find a mule. Well, countin' in the good and bad, it comes to between three and four dollars an acre. They got that much money?"

"Can you do it?"

"Yes, sir, Judge," Eli answered slowly. "We've got enough. We can do it."

"Rome!" Temple called his servant. He spoke to Matt Dumont. "Dumont, could you drive Zeke and Sol out there today? They could walk back. Let them see the place. Then you bring Tompkins in a week from Saturday. Zeke, you all be here Saturday-week bright and early. I'll take you to the courthouse," he half-smiled, "have to make sure that you don't get cheated again. Thanks, Dumont," he murmured, taking up his pen.

Sol had leaned over to lift Eli. He jerked around, "We sure do thank you, Judge. We all'll never forget it, sir."

Rome urged them through the door. However, Zeke stopped, facing about.

"Master?"

Temple had been gazing out of the window.

"Master, I ain't ever used the law before to help us out. I don't know, sir, how much I'm owin' you."

"Keep your money, Zeke. You'll need it. But, Zeke," John Temple hesitated. "Zeke, I expect you and your family not to give any trouble. People might blame me if you did. . . . You see, Zeke, it's not usual, a free black man owning a farm. If you all are sensible, and that boy of yours, sober, quiet . . . but I'm taking a big responsibility. Bear it in mind. I'm depending on you, Zeke."

"Yes, sir," Zeke said. He slipped from the room.

One day nothing in sight, the next a new vista opening up and spreading wide.

None of them did much sleeping the night before they went to claim their deed. To be on the eve of so wonderful a day no doubt deserved to be tasted, felt, enjoyed to the full. Till all hours they sat about, firelight lending its pleasant glow. First came their savings to be counted. They knew how much, but they had to be sure.

"There it is," Eli said. "Three hundred twenty-two dollars and thirty cents exactly. There'll be enough left over for the mule."

"And victuals for awhile," Sarah said.

"And seed. But I'll go on with my carpenterin'," Zeke said.

"I'll be busy farmin'," Sol almost whispered, as if afraid to utter the words. "So I can't do much else, I reckon, pa."

One or another from time to time would let his gaze rest lovingly on the precious money sack resting on Zeke's knees. Also they mused on former times, as if feeling out and fingering the last strands of the old bonds to be broken on the morrow. In this manner they spoke of the day that they went free, and those first hard, cheerless months, when it seemed as if freedom would always and forever come at too dear a price.

The sun shone down bright and warm that winter day. They sat, relaxed and comfortable, hardly feeling their bodies sway, back and forth, up and down, with the wagon's roll and bump. The dirt road stretched afar. No matter, their contented thoughts mused on, while in their ears sounded the mule's clop-clopping hoofs, the wheels' steady grind. Also now and then Zeke's voice sounded, as, humped over on the wagon seat, reins in hand, he talked to his mule.

In a chair behind Zeke, Sarah rode, smiling occasionally to herself, hearing his soft speaking with the mule. But more often, nodding, dozing, weary from the busy happy days just gone. To her ears came the murmur of Sol's and Emmy's voices behind her.

Sitting on the floor of the wagon, their cushion a bundle of quilts, they were likewise a little drowsy. Holding hands, or Sol with his arm around his bride, and Emmy's head resting on his shoulder, they cared little if they were crowded in among the load of goods.

Heavy pieces had gone before, just smaller lighter things hemmed them in.

On the seat beside his father Eli sat in his old, short-legged arm-chair, that was fixed to the plank. "It won't budge," Zeke had told him. "It's put there to stay." The time having come, Eli shared the excitement, letting his qualms take care of themselves. Soon the sun's warmth overcame him. The mule jogging, harness clinking rhythmically, brought an overpowering sleepiness. His thoughts wandered as the hours went by, seeing the place they were coming to, maybe making pictures of it in his head from what Sol had told him so many times.

Afterward, remembering the ride, they would tell of how long it had seemed compared to later years when they had got used to every hollow and hogpath. Now the newness of discovery was on them. Bends in the road, each patch of pines, little low blackjack woods, cypress swamps. Even these late December fields looked different, although actually they were like other fields at that time of year. Old cornstalks were prone on the ground, brown cotton stalks stood bare of leaves and of course of lint, except for a few pieces here and yonder straggling down as not having been worth going over for another picking. Nearly impassable mud holes in the road became to them a joyful task. Zeke and Sol, and if need be the women too, would climb out to heave with their shoulders at the wheels. Likewise hills, however winding and steep, were no burden to their legs; only Eli of course had at all times to ride. Creeks alone caused some anxiety, they were badly swollen now, and even shallow streambeds were hard pulling over rocks and through pebbles.

The declining sun brought the chill of winter back to the air. As it seemed suddenly, rounding a bend, they found themselves at the four corners. Birch's store, stark and dingy, was before them.

Sol stood up in the wagon, pointing eagerly over to the right. "Ain't far now, ma. West at the fork, at most three miles."

From the cluster of white men lolling on the high plank steps, came a voice, "Where you niggers from?"

Zeke said, "Evenin', sir," pulling up his mule.

Another voice demanded, "You those free niggers goin' to settle at Tompkins' place?"

Sol whispered, “Mr. Dewberry Hodges—his place is next to ours.”

To Zeke’s subdued, “Yes, sir,” Hodges spat, remarking, “See you tend to your own business. We don’t want no free-nigger trouble around Sand Hollow.”

Little was said while the mule slowly pulled the next mile. Their road, ribbon-like, dimly seen far ahead, wound through a deep thick woods, so dark they thought night had come. Coming out at the end it was still daylight. Now they saw a sight that Sol had told of. Old King’s Mountain standing over yonder clean and blue in the far away. The sun had dropped, but the wide sky above those far distant hills had flamed up like a fire; although scarcely had they caught a glimpse when the blaze died low and faded out. They watched the hills grow darker against the winter evening sky, hearing no sound but the creak of their wagon wheels, the mule’s hoofs striking as he plodded wearily.

Sol’s yell brought them to. He leaped from the wagon, and Emmy after him, both running up the road.

There stood the house plainly in view, back of it the outbuilding where the mule could be sheltered, hay could be stored, and an open lean-to where the wagon could be kept. The cabin seemed large after their old one, two big rooms, each with its own door. Smoke was drifting from their chimney, while the crackle of a lightwood knot could be heard, and Sol’s excited voice mingling with Emmy’s.

Emmy and Sol rushed to open the door. “Ain’t it wonderful?”

Sarah straightened her stiff body, craning around as she did so, looking first one way then the other.

“Uh-huh,” she was saying, “there’s the chinaberry tree. See, Eli, I’ve always wanted a crepe myrtle bush near my own door.” Picking up a sack of corn meal, she said, “I’m getting out, Zeke. Don’t hurry me. And hold that mule, now, while I step on the hub. You Sol!” she called. “Come out here and tote Eli. Zeke, hurry up with the mule. I’ll have hot victuals in a jiffy.”

“Sarah!” Zeke said. “See our land? Sarah, see all those fields?”

Her feet on the ground, Sarah looked around her. Zeke’s hand swept in a wide arc to either side of the cabin, taking in the slight wooded slope rising gently in the rear. The plowed acres were rutted and bare, old cotton stalks lying everywhere, dreary-looking at that time of year. To their eyes it mattered not at all. Winter would

pass, in no time they would begin to turn their furrows, see the green shoots showing themselves.

Sand Hollow had been their home for more than two years when war came. Never a day had been idle, hardly a week but heard the sound of nails driven, planks sawed, axe in woods chopping trees to cure for the wood supply. Now a new one-room cabin stood a few yards from the old one, Emmy and Sol settled in it. And now a baby's voice could be heard, and the women's voices comforting the child.

The fields were orderly now, cultivated acres, carefully tended. Sol of course had had no answers within himself to most of his problems. A knack he possessed for tilling the soil could take him just so far. He had practically none of the old farmers' lore, and Zeke had little, having learned his carpenter trade as a slave boy.

Anxiously Sol had sought out Matt Dumont when doubt waylaid his mind. Also an old free colored man, Simon Darrow, who lived alone on his farm a mile or so away. Both were rough and ready farmers, unable to tell anybody exactly why they did some things and avoided others. Sol made up for their vagueness by following their every move. What they did he had tried to copy, whether it was sowing the seed, hilling the corn, or laying-by. However, his crops those first years in corn, cotton, sorghum, sweet potatoes, tobacco, no doubt did very well because old Darrow came so often to lend a helping hand, even in plowing.

When it came to picking time, Sarah that first year had led them forth. "Don't you ask, Sol," she had admonished. "I know when it's time to pick." All went, including Emmy, then heavy with her child, and even Eli, who had wanted to go despite having to sit idle at the field's edge. He could share thus remotely in the pleasures of the first harvest time. As they went up and down picking their sacks full and emptying them, his voice had joined theirs in the lusty, rhythmic singing.

For two seasons they had gone forth to pick, and hauled their own cotton in to be sold. They went to meet the third year, 1861, high-hearted as before. No sign or premonition came to them in that bright, welcome spring. Their stand of cotton promised, their shoots of corn were a sturdy healthy green.

Then on a late May night, Sarah wakened, hoarse and hot with fever. Zeke rose from her side, calling anxiously, "Eli, your ma is sick. I'm goin' to fetch Emmy and Sol."

Vaguely Eli could recall rousing from oppressive sleep. Hardly knowing how he got there, he had pushed and worked himself into the next room.

As from a great distance, Eli felt the hours drag their time away. Sol left. Later he returned. Old Doctor Campbell soon appeared. Peter Baldwin came, and brought Emmy's mother. Simon Darrow passed, and learning of their trouble, settled down to help in any way he could. For the most part it was a matter of waiting. The pneumonia presently took its course. In three days Sarah was gone.

Old Darrow helped Sol put together the pine coffin. Not Zeke, his hand never could have sawed and smoothed those planks, driven those sharp nails. Peter Baldwin shouldered Zeke's heavy spade and took his way up the slope behind the houses. The women laid Sarah out.

"Let it be mid-afternoon," the preacher said, "before evening chores press to be got after."

Where the big elm spread its shade on the yard, at this hour even touching Sarah's door, Eli waited in his chair, Zeke idle on the bench. As the others saw the shadow growing longer, one by one they dropped their tasks, drifting here to sit and wait. Old Darrow and the preacher talked desultorily. Emmy murmured, gently swaying with the child.

"It's cool enough, I reckon." Peter Baldwin bent down, lifting Eli. "All right, son." To the others, "I'll be back in just a minute."

On the slope there had to be this open grave with its heap of fresh-dug clayey earth. Eli watched the preacher turn away from him. Insofar as his mind knew the thoughts he had, they told him it was but due, right, seemly, having them remain below, all to walk with her body. They so few, and what a pity. Anyhow, this soil . . . belonged to her.

Presently they came into view, the four men with toiling steps, old Darrow more especially straining at the heavy load. Eli looked, but scarcely saw. His ears hardly heard the women's sobs from where they trudged behind Sarah's coffin.

Sol's crops cried out for him. Dawn the next day heard the clink of his plow chains. All took up again their customary tasks. Zeke moved himself and Eli directly to the one-room cabin, insisting upon it, and settled Sol and Emmy and the child in his two-room place.

As the sun came overhead that morning, Peter Baldwin brought his teams around to the front. He seated himself on Eli's new doorstep.

"Eli, it'll get easier by and by."

"It ain't as if I had anybody of my own left." Eli's tone was low and dull.

"That ain't right, son. You've got your people. You've got your whole life still ahead."

"Crippled! Nothin' but a helpless lame man havin' to be toted and waited on! Ma gone . . . no wife, no woman would want such a man!"

"Eli, you're a man of learnin' as few black men ever get to be. Give the Lord a chance. He can use you, he'll make up to you for things you've missed."

"The Lord! Where is He? What's it mean, that He lets grief and bitterness of loss come on us? Why this awful pain and woe?"

"Eli . . ."

"I'm able to earn hardly anything. If I could, I'd save, go away, go as far as I could get. Can't I ever leave this place, get away from this land that mistreats us? Go far, find somethin' a lame man could do, somehow live a useful life?"

"I know it's hard," Baldwin frowned. "But, Eli, you're here. I reckon that's as it's goin' to be for the present. You're crippled; that's mighty hard; but we can't help it. Your ma's gone. A man has got to raise up his head, turn his face to what may be. Eli!" he said. "Son, listen to me. There is something ahead for all of us—I'm confident there may be. Had you thought"—lowering his tone, although not even a squirrel was at hand to hear—"what might come from this war? The Rebels may win. But they may not. Eli, I lie awake at nights, get too excited to sleep. Tell myself, Is this heaven openin' wide? This the righteousness of His comin' who judges, makes war? This the treadin' out the winepress of the wrath and fierceness of Almighty God?"

“I can’t have the hope you do.”

“Eli! Read, study, make you ready.”

“What could I get ready for? Crippled. A burden to my folks. Oh,” he muttered, “nobody knows how I want to be free of this feelin’. All my life, it seems to me, nothin’ but kickin’ against the pricks.”

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2

In the Wilderness



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1

Planting time was near. Sol had his plow out that very day. Eli knew he would. He had seen Sol take some earth between his hands the way a man does who likes to work the land; and had heard him say how the soil felt good, just right for the furrow; and how time pressed. Sol now plowed single-handed, for Zeke had died in 1863, two years after Sarah. Sol had gone forth with his mule to do some plowing. Emmy had settled to her chores around the cabin. Eli had done the only thing he could, sit where they had put him in his chair outside his own door with his Bible alongside him where he could reach it when he would. That was all they were doing on that great day when freedom came to the people.

As Sol remarked, how could they have been readier than they were? When Emmy had fretted that their clothes were in the tub, Sol had laughed aloud, and said, “You don’t sit around for Judgment Day, waitin’ till it comes. You sure would starve.” In a manner of speaking, it felt like Judgment Day. To Eli it did, the way he thought it would, like something ended now, and something fine beginning.

On that day Sol had come galloping back from the field. He was yelling so his voice could be heard far down the road. It seemed crazy, but they were sure they heard his voice shout, “Free! Free!” Emmy straightened her back quick from her washtub. Eli, wondering, fearful, took tight hold on his chair arms. Sol kept on yelling and shouting till he jerked his mule up in the yard, and practically fell off him. “They’ve surr—rendered! The people are free!” And his feet no more than struck the ground than he began to jump and dance all over the place. Of course, when Emmy caught onto what he meant she began dancing too. And little Jim, who had been out playing in the barn, came running, and began to shout and dance because they did. Eli had to sit in his chair. But inside him he was on his feet the way they were. His head was dizzy, his heart was thumping, the way a man’s does who is leaping for joy.

Sol got his breath enough to tell them how it came. He was plowing in the field, when a man came running—nobody he knew, just a man, a slave, or he had been a slave till he heard that news. He was just telling people, that was all. At his master's plantation he had heard the word, so he had set out running. He told Sol, his breath coming hard, and ran right on.

Sol himself went very soon. He jumped on his mule and set out for the town there and then, let the plowing go. He had to know, he had to see, he had to hear what the people were doing and saying that day. And he stayed in town. All day long and into the night they saw him not at all. And Emmy went, Emmy and little Jim. They started out walking, not anywhere but the crossroads store, less than three miles. But still they knew people would be there, they would hear what was said, and just be around. Eli was left all alone where he was.

Some people passed. Down the road they came, hurrying past the cabins, came from the farms, big and little farms in the up-country yonder. Somehow or other they had heard the news and were making for somewhere—town or somewhere. Almost anywhere would do it seemed, just so they went where people were and they could hear a lot of people saying the words their ears liked to hear. Anyhow, they were free, they could go, so they had started out down the road. They would call out to Eli when they passed, and he would call back saying, Yes, he knew. Maybe they would stop, get a drink of water from the spring, and tell who they were, say, "Praise the Lord!" and hurry on. But mostly that day Eli sat in his doorway alone.

Of course he saw Sol gallop off, and thought of the people, maybe hundreds of them, milling round in the town, and the excitement and talk and song. He did not know how it would be; there had never been such a day in their lives. But then a man could not help but imagine. It tore at his heart, wishing to be there. This was so at first. But more and more as the day wore on, he welcomed the chance to be alone to think his thoughts, feel, understand.

Bondage for his race. So familiar, and he had assumed that it would have to be, despite the times when he had dreamed the contrary. They had left him feeling guilty, as if it were wrong, as if even to think might betray him to whites. Not that he had ever let his

fears take form, let himself say, "This is why I won't think," but had pushed the reason into deep hidden places, telling himself, It's foolishness to hope. On this day of emancipation, it rushed over him, he could let his mind go. He, long a freedman, felt as if he had been bound, the way he now felt so free. He flung wide open the doors of his mind, let his thoughts come pouring forth, whatever came, he let it come. It was true, the pictures crowding in were indistinct, although he strained to see them. What he saw was as though through a fog; he could not perceive what it would be like, now freedom had come, how it would be different.

The sun was well overhead when close by he heard a familiar voice. Old Simon Darrow stood beside him; Eli had not even heard his approach. He cast a quick look at the little man: no excitement on the wrinkled old face, nor in the eyes that seemed absent and absorbed, as Darrow gazed out across Sol's field.

"The people are free—you've heard, Simon!"

"I know." Darrow sat on the doorstep. Reaching for a twig he began to chew it slowly. "I spec' my children will be getting' home soon."

"Your children!"

Eli had forgotten, Darrow had children. Of course he had heard it, although Darrow had never spoken of it except to say, "They were took away." Eli had supposed that they had been sold.

Of a sudden the old man seemed to have a new feeling—perhaps realization had just taken hold—for he began to talk, began to tell his story, the tale that for so long had been bottled up. Eli had never, in all the years he had known him, seen this Simon Darrow.

"I spec' they'll be comin', won't take them long, though they're a far piece. It don't matter, they'll get here somehow. My, that sure was a time." Old Darrow sat shaking his head.

"How far have they got to come?" Eli asked.

"Bought myself," Darrow said, as if Eli had not spoken, "in the spring of '47. Belonged to old Arnold. Blacksmith, sixty then, prime days passed—reckon he thought so—I fooled him, look at me. Paid two hundred thirty dollars. Wife belonged to Ed Sommers. Had three children, wife died when the last one come. I aimed to buy my children."

"That Roy Sommers' pa?" Eli asked.

"No, uncle," Darrow said. "Asa was Roy's pa, like as two peas. Ed Sommers died, left things to his wife. My children fell to her. Asa began to run her place, as mean a man as ever trod this earth. I told him my intentions. No sirree, he told me, my children couldn't go free, not any nigger he had a say-so about. He would have Widow Sommers call in the slave trader, sell those children. And they were worth a heap, Anna and Janie, and my boy Isaac. All three were nearly grown, real smart children."

"And he sold them?" Eli said.

"Naw." The old man looked sly. "He didn't sell them."

"What happened then?" For Darrow had stopped and sat smiling to himself.

"Well," he said. "A stranger passed by my place one day. A white man. Peddler. It's a fact," and Darrow chuckled, "I had chanced to speak to Preacher Baldwin not long before, tellin' him my troubles with Asa Sommers. Well, this here peddler spread out his wares in my house, and asked me how I chanced to be a free man. I told him. Then somehow I got to tellin' him about my children. He asked me some questions, then he went away."

"Go on," Eli pressed him.

"One day"—Darrow gave a snort—"Asa Sommers galloped up to my place, horse sweatin', he in a passion, he had vengeance in him, you would o' thought he was goin' to blow my brains out. 'Where's your children?' he hollered, stomping round. 'At their mistress's,' I told him. 'Ain't laid eyes on a single one since last time mistress give them a pass to visit me.' Sommers raged and stomped. I knew nothin'. He could do nothin', so he went away."

"And then what?" Eli urged.

"Had another visit from that white peddler by and by," Darrow said. "Know what he told me? Said, 'Old man, don't fret. Your children are all right—long way off—but good and safe.'"

"Can't you tell me where they are?" Eli said.

"Where?" old Darrow looked at Eli. "I reckon. Up in Ohio, way up there. They got there some kind o' way. That's when I bought my farm," Darrow mused again. "Yes sir, first piece, ninety-eight acres, paid hundred-ninety dollars; other place, I paid more for, heap better land, three-hundred-fifty dollars, it was worth it. I spec' they'll be comin' along soon as they can get here."

"That'll be fine!" and there rushed over Eli how it would feel—having old Darrow's children coming home, till he wished he could shout or sing, let out somehow the feeling he had.

"I wish I weren't a cripple," he burst out. "I could do something!"

Old Darrow cocked his head at Eli.

"Mind you, Eli"—he spit and wiped his mouth. "I been a-thinkin' people free now, things'll be kind of different. You've got learnin'. There ain't many colored got what you've got. Cripple don't matter. You can read, you can write, your voice can be heard. What more will you have?"

Long after Darrow had disappeared around the bend Eli sat staring after him. A vague irritation now possessed him. He was restless, and got down from his chair, making his slow way to the water bucket. "Your voice can be heard." Foolishness, he thought. He returned to his chair and tried to read, but thoughts crowded in, disturbing thoughts, he dropped his book and let his troubled gaze rest on trees across the road. Presently he dropped his head in his hands. It may be he prayed, if so it was a vague fleeting kind of thing—no definite words, and for awhile he remained, head bowed. Until presently he heard his thoughts say as plainly as though he had spoken aloud, "Lord, is there maybe some way I could help my people?"

Eli felt a great relief. He lifted up his head, his eyes felt clear, with a sense in him that he could see for miles if only he were on a high place. And it seems he noticed how springlike it was more than before. The fields new-turned; and he could smell the good fresh earth; the trees with the feathery look they have when leaves are young; in the fallow field beyond the house lots of wildflowers, blue and yellow, waving and nodding. So as it chanced Emmy and little Jim found Eli singing when they got home.

They were coming home along the dusty road, tired but feeling mighty good, Jim kicking his feet in the dirt as a little boy will, while over beyond old King's Mountain the sun was beginning to go down in a rosy kind of sky. Of a sudden Emmy stopped and said, "Listen, Jim," because just then Eli had lifted up his voice. And Emmy knew it for the song that he and his mother used to sing together a good many years before. Eli sang that evening so you would have thought his voice would reach clear to the heaven above,

This is the day of jubilee . . .
The Lord has set his people free . . .

Great day! the righteous are marching!
Great day . . .

The man that Eli most wanted to see was the preacher, see that look on his face, hear the deep tone in his voice, hear him say—maybe, maybe—“See, Eli, ain’t it so? *Behold I make all things new!*”

Sol had told Eli how he had seen him in the town on that day, people crowding, those great throngs everywhere. Up there at courthouse square they were milling round, hundreds even from out in the county coming into town all the time, hollering and shouting, crying even, but with joy; just moving up and down, going no particular place, liking the feeling that they could move about as they pleased. Sol said he had never known how many slaves the preacher was acquainted with, the way they would come running up to him, he would call out their names, even folks from out in the county who had never been near preaching. They would come shouting “Glory hallelujah!” “Praise the Lord!” And he would take them in a great hug, maybe two or three at a time, and lift up a child high above his head, stand there a minute gazing up into that little dark child’s face, his own face with such a look on it—Sol said it made him want to cry. And then out in the colored settlement, the crowds grew bigger there, free people mixing in among slaves—they were not slaves anymore—the preacher everywhere, moving among them. And toward evening it seemed the word had gone around, anyway all began to throng toward the house. There were too many to begin to get close; they pushed and pressed into the yard under the trees, seeing the preacher standing there on the little porch in the doorway, towering high above all heads, being such a big man. It was like revival time, Sol told Eli, but different from anything anybody had ever known. The preacher would thunder out a line, people would join like it was a shout,

Free at last, free at last. . . .

Their voices would pour out the tune, till it must have sounded to Jericho,

Some of those mornings, bright and fair
I thank God I’m free at last,

Goin' to meet King Je—sus in the air,
I thank God I'm free at last!

O—free at last. . . .

They sang some more, any songs they took a notion to; the preacher prayed once or twice; he didn't preach, but he would say Scripture now and then, verses he knew off by heart, it almost seemed as if he were preaching; and the people would let out their shouts, they would cry out their joy.

"What was the Scripture?" Eli asked Sol.

Sol grinned, telling Eli, "To tell the truth, I was very likely shou-
tin' a little myself, feelin' that happy." He said, "I don't know."

Peter Baldwin came when Eli least expected him. Rain poured, and April though it was, Eli had a blaze going in his fireplace. No sound came of the horse in the yard when it took its way around to the barn, just rain beating on the roof and shutters, till he heard the step at his door, and the voice call, "You here, Eli?" Baldwin stood in the doorway.

"It came, son! Freedom came!"

They gazed at one another as if to comprehend. Then Baldwin dropped on the bench, and the two sat in silence, each one lost in his own thoughts.

Presently Eli asked him, "How does it chance that you're way out here?"

"I'm getting' round," Baldwin said. "Tryin' to go about the county a little. The freed people have need of help. So many things." He began to tell of what he was seeing, talking of it far into the night. Once he said, smiling warmly to recall it, "You see, Eli. It's a good thing you kept at your books." At which Eli raised his head as if startled, a troubled look flitting over his face.

Hardly more than three weeks after emancipation, June Sims came. "Place seemed nearly like a settlement," he told them afterward. "Two cabins, not just one. And the barn and pigsty and chicken coop. Your wagon sittin' under the lean-to, and that nice little smoke-house you got. Clean clothes were hangin' on the line, that told me folks were nigh. I saw Jim a-playin' in the dirt. Colored people, I told myself. Then it was I spied Eli sittin' in his doorway."

Eli saw June from the moment he turned the bend in the road. And here in itself was a curious thing—the way he noticed June’s slow, heavy tread, and how June took his lonesome stand beneath the big elm across the road. This man was in trouble—Eli noticing this—sensing from afar another’s troubled mind.

He sang out, “Howdy, brother,” and June came shyly into the yard and dropped on the bench by Eli’s step.

“Where you bound?” Eli said.

June was silent.

“Ain’t you got a place?” thinking as he said it of just the day before.

A whole troop of people had passed his door, even old people and children. He had called to them, “Where you bound?” And all had stopped—they had seemed mighty tired. A grizzled old man had answered, “Mister, we don’t know. We ain’t got no place. Old master, he dead. Old mistress, she shut up our place, lock, stock and barrel. Shut the big house, shut the quarters, sold off the stock, movin’ into town. Tell us we are free, so go any place. Well, we ain’t got any place, and we don’t know where to go.”

But June said, “It ain’t that.”

June’s eyes were hollow, he looked worn out. Eli began to ask questions, nothing in particular, just the stranger’s name, who had been his master, what was he figuring on doing, now that he was free. Suddenly tears welled up in June’s eyes. Eli turned away lest the man be embarrassed.

“I can’t find my wife,” June said. Haltingly, he told of it.

June’s wife was found, and all due to Eli—at least June always told it that way. “Eli said we ought to ask Preacher Baldwin. Eli himself wrote the preacher in Columbia.” And in fact it was the man to whom he had written, Rev. Aldrich, who went inquiring for Annie May at Mrs. Temple’s mother’s back door. Annie May had stopped outside, and Rev. Aldrich had told her, “June is lookin’ for you. He’s back at Sand Hollow.” And Annie May had not even gone back inside the house.

Eli would not forget that May evening, and the two, hand in hand, coming toward him through the dusk, and the hoarse wonder in June’s voice, “Eli, you found Annie May. She’s found, Eli.” And Annie May’s laugh and gay retort, “Don’t June beat all? Last time I knew,

he was lost somewheres down near Columbia, diggin' mounds for his master to stop the Yankees."



The Darrow children got home in early summer. The old man brought them down the next evening—despite their long and wearying journey, he would not let them wait, they had to come. Telling their journey, it was fresh in their minds, and their coming was fresh and still wonderful. Eli, listening, felt the quickening that he had come to know, the sense of somehow being outside himself, and feeling as they felt, while he lived the tale they told.

The journey all the way from Ohio had dragged, although not as it had five years before, when they had slipped away to freedom, not the lying out by day, and the stealing through the night. This time they had got rides sometimes, though when they had found no means, they were up at daybreak—Anna had them up—trudging on the road. At last the day had come, only one mile still before them. It was then they had passed Sol working in his far field, and he had called, "Howdy." And had passed Eli, he had spoken from his doorway. They had seen them both, Anna said they had, but they were hastening so, it was as if they had not really seen them. They had come to the clearing where the lonesome pine stood. "Quarter-mile now," Isaac had muttered. It was here that Janie had begun to run. Then Isaac. Then even Anna. As they ran, they'd begun to yell. Seeing the little house just ahead, they had screamed, "Pa, you here?" "Pa, we're home!"

"It was an evenin'!" Old Darrow kept saying. And he told them, "The girls turned in and cooked my supper, and Isaac went out and tended chores. All I did was sit!"—how the old man beamed.

The others had been smiling at the old man's pleasure. Suddenly from Eli came peeling forth a burst of full, joyful laughter. All turned, almost startled, then they began to laugh, until the very room seemed to rock with their mirth.

It was then that Anna came and sat beside him, voice warm, eyes friendly. "Pa says you've read heaps of books, Eli." Though she added, and this made him frown a little. "It will come in mighty handy, now that freedom's come."



Sol brought Luke Judson from the field on a day in late June.

"He found me at my plowin'," Sol said of Luke.

"I had heard," Luke told them, "that he owned his land. Thought he might help me find a little piece to rent."

They went on speaking of it as they sat at evening victuals.

Luke had been saying how his old master had wanted him to stay on just like before; and how he had figured to rent a piece that he and his wife and three boys could work; and how Luke's master had said to him, "Luke, I can't let you have the land, you've got nothin' to pay or do with." Hearing Luke tell of it, Eli felt indignant: the master was well able to help Luke this way.

"You can find a piece to rent," he said with some heat. "Don't listen to him."

Luke glanced at Eli, saying absently, "That's so." And then he looked again.

"You can read, can't you?"

"Why, yes," Eli said.

"I've got three boys. None of them can read."

"They've had no chance."

"They've got a right."

"Yes."

"How did you chance to?"

"Preacher Baldwin taught me. That was not long after we went free."

"We all are free now. My boys are free."

"I know."

"Did you ask him to teach you?"

"It was his doin'."

"Did you want to read?"

"Yes, I wanted to a heap."

"I want my boys to. And they want it too."

"Yes, I know how that is."

Eli heard Luke sigh as he turned away.



Tim Moore came not long after this. Early July. It began in July, this feeling Eli had of being adrift, being carried somewhere, and with little say-so.

Tim walked directly up to his door. And spoke directly.

"I'm Tim Moore. I come here to know if you'll teach me to read and write."

"How did you know?" Eli asked. He could see Tim's face where he sat on the step, and judged him to be a man of nearly thirty, though with rangy men it was sometimes hard to tell.

"Who told you of me?"

"I just heard. They said a man . . ."

"A lame man."

"Uh-huh, that a cripple lived here who could read anything. I set out."

"Were you free before?" Eli asked, hardly knowing himself that he wished to change the subject.

"I always belonged on the Temple place, born there." Tim turned and looked full at Eli—he would not soon forget the man's steady gaze. "Will you teach me?"

"I've never taught a grown man before. Or anybody, but my brother and his little boy. And my brother was little when I taught him." Eli was about to make further excuses but then fell silent.

"I want it mighty bad," Tim Moore said.

Eli felt Tim's eyes still on him. Something stirred, old memories perhaps, of how it had felt to see the printed page, and wonder, dream, of what was written on it.

"I'll try," he heard himself say. "I'll do the best I can. When did you aim to start?"

"Now," Tim said. "I mean, that bein' agreeable."

Tim got to his feet.

"Can I fetch you anything? A book or some paper?"



Eli had not minded such a manner in Tim. When Dan Martin was the one, it was a different matter, although at the outset he was drawn to the man. Martin appeared early in September, though then he dropped from sight, until Tim came saying that Martin was now working at the sawmill where he worked.

It was sunset time. Emmy, just returned from the field, could be heard inside her house starting up her fire. Sol and young Jim were still in the field, using the last light the evening afforded. Eli, reading by his open door, heard the step on the road and raised his eyes.

A stranger, heavysset, powerful-looking, uncommonly black, came trudging down the road, headed toward the crossroads. He stopped outside the yard and gave a nod. Road dust lay thick on his face and garments. He took off his cap to wipe his face. It was an army cap, and the dusty jacket slung over the man's arm was a faded blue army jacket. A man of his race a Union soldier. Here was a sight that Eli had not seen before. Why would he not press the man to come in, rest, have a drink of cool water.

"My name's Dan Martin." His voice was deep and rumbling. "I been mustered out o' Sherman's Army. Sergeant." He said this proudly.

Emmy and Sol made the soldier stay the night, themselves greatly pleased when they saw the blue jacket. And little Jim was big-eyed and pleased, even slipped behind the door to try on Martin's cap. All three of them, however, weary from their fieldwork, soon began to doze where they sat. Just Eli and Martin, across the hearth from each other, with the candle on the mantle, flickering and sputtering. Eli grew restless at the long-lasting silence.

. . . Old Doc Arnold had been his master. Then one dark night about a year ago, word had drifted to him, "Sherman's Army ain't far." So he'd slipped off the place and started out looking. . . . Martin told little enough about his soldiering. For the most part, he told of things down around the Sea Islands.

"With my own eyes I saw the land that General Sherman gave those people, land their masters had run away from. Good land. My!" Martin's eyes burned. "Those fields looked pretty. Rows so straight, furrows clean, no weeds. Their land."

"All of them get it?"

"No. Too many followin' Sherman's Army, though a good many did."

"Given to them?"

"Not given free. They signed a paper. They were furnished mules, plows, seeds, feed for stock, even victuals to keep them. Signed a paper to pay back when crops were in."

Martin took a paper from his pocket, and began to smooth it out on his heavy knee. The man's bold stare made Eli uneasy.

"On this paper is copied the order that General Sherman gave when he gave the people down Sea Island way their land. Man, you say you can write. You copy this paper. Tell the people, this is what they need."

It may have been Martin's commanding tone, or his morose manner, his smoldering eyes. Whatever it was, it made Eli speak the very first words that entered his head.

"The people need the grace of God! They need Christ crucified!"

"Yes, they need that." Still Martin kept on holding out the paper.

But then he stood up and stepped across the hearth. "He's thinking I'm a cripple," was Eli's fleeting thought. Reaching down, and as though he had a right to, Martin picked up Eli's Bible, and slipping the paper between the pages, he put the book back where it belonged.



The paper was still there when the Preacher next came—"Presiding Elder" he was now, and had been for weeks. Eli showed Martin's paper to the Elder, who nodded as he read it, and said, "Can I have it?", and carefully folded it and put it in his pocket.

Eli and Baldwin talked late that evening of the many new churches cropping up throughout the county. "African Methodist Episcopal, Eli," as though he liked to roll the words on his tongue. "It's fine, son, working for the Lord beside one's own." The Elder told of his visit to Charleston, and of having seen their bishop, Daniel Payne, and of how he had been a slave, and had returned to Carolina after thirty years of freedom up north. "I wish you could have heard him!" The Elder stood up, and flinging out an arm, declaimed the Bishop's words, "You'll lose half your manhood if you admit to any distinction in the House of God!" Eli felt a thrill go through him. "I want to do something!"—the words burst from him, although another feeling quickly intruded, as though the sensitive chord that was touched had responded so quickly as to make him uneasy. Already, however, the Elder had replied, "Don't worry, son, there'll be something soon."



Thus September came and a certain Sabbath day. Eli sat waiting near his door. Absent eyes were seeing nothing, rested on cool tall pines across the road, and drifted on the little waves of September heat that hung suspended up and down the ripening cotton rows. Sunday quiet lay on fields and woods. It appealed to him, although not today. If only six months . . . for his mind had been dwelling on various things these months had brought.

Now Sol had told Luke Judson, "Come and welcome Sabbath evenin'." And had told June Sims and Annie May. He himself had told Tim Moore at his lesson, "Providin' it don't seem too far from your place." And Tim had said he'd like to bring Dan Martin. The Darrows they knew would come in any case, for old Darrow had been coming throughout the years to attend Sunday "meeting" at Sol's house, even though it was nothing but a family circle. Having had no church out Sand Hollow way to which free colored could go, from that first winter—nearly eight years now—they had been gathering on the Sabbath, holding prayer meetings the best they could. Eli could still hear his mother that first Sunday, "Zeke, you pray. Eli can read the Scripture. And he can raise the tunes." When their father had died, Sol had said, "You pray, Eli. I don't know how to." He had not minded leading so long as Darrow was the only outsider. He did not mind it now, it was not this that troubled him. Things seemed to push him while he still felt unready. And he felt so restless to sit idle, doing nothing.

The sun by now had dropped low in the West. Eli could tell by the lengthening shadows that spread across the yard till they touched the roadway. He heard Emmy say, "Sol, ain't it fine?—neighbors comin', lots of neighbors!" And soon they were coming, calling out their greetings.

June and Annie May. All the Darrows, riding up in the old man's wagon. Tim Moore, with him big Dan Martin. And the Judsons, Luke, his wife, and their boys, Arnie, Henry, and little Joshua, and old Aunt Ella, Mary Judson's mother.

"So many people!" Eli heard Jim shout, his voice shrilling out his joy.

When it came time, they moved into Sol's house, and as they settled, quiet fell, even the children seeming to want it. Faces sober, all turned their eyes on Eli, where he sat by the chimney piece, Bible on his knee. Curious, he reflected, all gazing his way, yet their eyes had the look of people lost in their own thoughts. Maybe thinking how different things were for them now. He sat musing on their faces, as they joined in the tunes, and listened to the Scripture that he knew off by heart.

Cotton was in that chill November day, except for the little scattered here and yonder; they had not had time before to go and glean those few pounds. Eli sat before his fire in the late afternoon, by his fireplace a stack of split lightwood and blackjack sticks, where he could reach them at need. His thoughts kept straying from the book he was reading, chafing at his helpless lot. Being waited on. His very firewood having to be split and fetched by Sol or Emmy, or even young Jim, a seven-year-old child.

From outside came a soft halloo.

Eli called. Old Darrow stepped inside, closing the creaking door behind him. He leaned against the chimney piece, chewing steadily. They exchanged a few remarks, though the old man seemed restless. He coughed and spit and tended the fire, till Eli, realizing that something was afoot, began to watch Darrow with a puzzled feeling.

"Well, Eli," Darrow gazed at the ceiling. "I've been sent to tell you something. We've got it all fixed up for you to teach school. Don't fret." Eli had tried to break in. "Between us we'll ride you. And the big boys'll tote you as need be 'round the room. We've even got a schoolhouse bein' fixed, that old empty cabin on my place. Now cotton's in, Sol and Isaac goin' to patch it up good. If you want, Anna says tell you she'll teach the littler ones. We done already figured out everything."

Emmy came laughing delightedly, exclaiming, "We had an awful time keepin' the secret!" Young Jim sang, "I'm goin' to a school!" June Sims appeared, beaming pleasure, "Now Annie May's expectin', we'll soon have another schoolchild for you." Luke Judson named off his three boys, "All of them, even to Arnie I'll let come. Arnie can come durin' slack season; he's big maybe, but he's got a right to learn." Sol came hurrying from the store one evening. "Freedmen

begun to send word to Darrow's, 'When do you all aim to start that school?' Ain't it nice, Eli, everybody so tickled?"

Soon Peter Baldwin came driving by. He lifted from his buggy an armful of books, and a few slates and pencils. He carried these in and laid them on Eli's bed. "Mostly from the Freedmen's Bureau," he said. "And Mr. Strong sent you these readin' books. He's the new white teacher, Eli, come from North Car'lina. He's startin' up a boardin' school for freedmen's boys." Throughout that day and far into the night, Eli fingered and pondered his schoolbooks.

Work on the schoolhouse got under way, and soon Eli was in it when the wagon went to Darrow's. It seemed so warm, so full of friendliness, with a nice crowd gathering to watch every stage, and the neighborly feeling pervading the place. A man one day addressed him as "Teacher," and others took it up as if they liked the sound. It caught at his throat the first few times he heard it, to think that it could actually mean himself. Some who drifted by to watch were strangers, yet looking on the schoolhouse, they took it to themselves. He could overhear them: "My four children comin'"; "Mine'll have to walk three miles."

Preparations continued into early December, with each day bringing some final news report. "Got the roof mended." "Nearly done the little wing, though Anna"—who would teach in it—"says openin' can wait on it." "Doorlock's fixed." "Fireplace is drawin'." "Shelf's put up for the water bucket now." "Benches were put in place this evenin'. And a nice little table for you to sit behind, Eli."

Opening day was set, and "opening" was the word on everybody's tongue as the time drew near. Eli's ears would likewise tingle with it; except that old qualms rushed in to plague him. How could he get around?—how could the big boys tote him, and even if they could, could he make himself not mind—the teacher being carried?—it would never seem right. And how could he make such grown boys behave, when they were so big, so much stronger than himself? If only he weren't crippled—it was the old refrain—he would like to teach. . . .

Opening day itself remained blurred in Eli's mind. The dawn-rising from a sleepless night. Sol's call, Emmy's bustle, eating something, though he had no notion what. The mile ride in chill morning

air, and the quiver it gave him when the wagon bumped. The coming to the clearing on old Darrow's place, and seeing smoke pouring from the chimney mouth, with Anna Darrow beaming in the doorway. "School time!" she called—he would hear it always. And seeing the children, so many children of every size and age and kind, standing outside in the schoolyard, waiting, staring at the teacher being carried. Then pushing. It had bothered him, the being jostled, no kind of order or seemly manner in it. He had made Sol set him quickly in his chair behind the teacher's table, and had spoken sternly, almost harshly to the children, regretting it the moment the words were out.

The remainder of the day somehow took its course, though what he did with it he was never sure. Only its end left an imprint on his mind, clear and strong: the good feeling of his body stretching out on his bed, for he was very weary; but better still, as he sank toward sleep, the wonderful thought, He must wake betimes, school tomorrow, it's a school day, and he must teach.

His days became altogether different from anything they had ever been before. Now he must be stirring at daybreak, eat his bite without delay, and be off to school. He had divided school chores among the children, each big child a turn, but they must be seen to: fire started, wood split and brought in, water bucket filled from Darrow's spring, benches put straight. The evening before the place had been swept and garnished for the next school day; however, in the morning one of the girls must give the turkey-feather duster another quick go over table and benches. At day's end, except for Anna, Eli was the last one to leave, the shutters firmly fastened, and the big key turned and placed in Anna's hands to keep. During these short December days, dark had fallen when Eli got home.

Old Darrow and Luke Judson were soon coming to him. "All have talked the matter over and sent us to tell you. You are to get a little book, and put down in it the name of every child. Keep account of them. What folks can pay they're goin' to. It's to be yours and Anna's for yourselves. Teachers are paid. Ours are goin' to be."

Eli demurred. "They've got so little. And I make something at my little jobs." Actually, he was making very little, for Sol had not time

as Zeke once did, to make small pieces, a chair or stool, that Eli could give the finish to and sell in town.

"You won't have time now," Judson said. "The workman is worthy of his hire, so the Good Book says. Anyway, it feels real good to pay for things."

"It's right that way," Anna told Eli. "Folks had rather do it that way."

Eli's accounts amounted to little. Some planters the year that the war ended found money enough when cotton was sold to pay cash wages, so that a few children came with coins tied in a rag, telling Eli, "Pa sent it to you, Teacher." Usually children brought a few fresh eggs, or some sweet potatoes, or a peck of corn meal if they raised their own corn, or a side of bacon. Whatever it was, Eli entered the item. From the first, he treasured the book, for oftentimes when he sat alone he would ponder its pages as if they told him something. They seemed to stir him in a pleasant way.

He savored deeply the taste of being settled. His life work found, decision time was past, and the unsettling feeling of change-around-the-corner that had been his daily portion since freedom came. One part of him had relished that expectancy, the constant excitement of new things on the march; but deep within he welcomed its let-up, and the pleasurable certainty that his own course was clear. Even so, with his altered habits, he knew a big change after he began to teach. The old withdrawn feelings were less frequent now; he found he sat up straight instead of slumping; and he rarely felt the wish as of old to draw back in avoidance of something, he hardly knew what. He smiled a good deal, and felt like teasing folks, and heard himself laugh, and saw others smile back. His contentious feelings were less tinged with gloom, and came less by fits and starts, and had more rhyme and reason: he even knew these things about himself.

Hog-killing time caught up with them, smell of roasting pork rising in the air, plain reminder of approaching Christmas season. The first Christmas since emancipation. Eli felt as never before in his life a glow of joyful anticipation. Unbidden his mind kept turning back to recount again the year almost past. He could never forget his thoughts at that Christmas, of how strange it was that a man

must wait until his thirties to begin his life. It could be called beginning when emancipation came, opening doors. As he watched that New Year draw closer, elation filled him at the months that lay ahead. What a leaf they would turn, he kept telling himself. What a fine leaf.

2

The wing of the schoolhouse was complete by the new year, with Anna now teaching in the smaller room. Even so, the benches overflowed, with nearly every morning new faces appearing, as more distant families learned of the school. Anna scoffed at imposing limits; with a sweep of ample arms she dispelled the very thought. "It'll be all right, Eli. Don't you bother, I'll take more of the littler ones. You take in these big boys and girls. Least we can do is give them a chance; readin' and writin'—they can have that much; poor things—they want it so bad." Eli himself was knowing pleasure in it: the overfull rooms, the shifting and planning, the nearly every day that saw Anna and himself in busy consultation after school.

It was not the only time that he was seeing Anna. She appeared at Emmy's as she had not hitherto; this had been happening since early December; and if Eli was over at his own house, she appeared at his door to consult him on something, or to borrow a book. Anna had told him that she wished to read more. Often as not they would begin to talk, as a usual thing, of school affairs, but then of other matters. Or what was nearer the truth, Eli would talk while Anna would listen, saying little more than "Yes, that's so," but her tone was always warm, her eyes often glowing. Perhaps it was not so much of what they spoke, for it seemed to matter little where Anna was concerned. Let Eli begin, let his thoughts begin to flow, and his eyes to light up, his voice to deepen, let the images that he made with words begin to form before Anna's eyes—images of what?—in a way this did not matter—sometimes of places of which he had read, or of times long gone and far away, or of thoughts he had pondered and never until now given voice to—and Anna, eyes on Eli's face, or fixed on the fire, would seem to lose herself. One day Anna asked to be told the tale of when Eli had gone free. From that time they often spoke of it, Eli calling up more and more old memories of what he used to think and how he used to feel. In this way they came to talk of whites, or Eli talked while Anna mostly listened, though here

again, as Eli later told himself, Anna kept saying many times over, “Eli, that’s exactly how I feel.”

Eli gave no name to what he felt, what he might have felt if he had let himself. When Anna was near, he dwelt in today, letting each tomorrow take care of itself. If sometimes in fantasy Anna’s image hovered, he never let it enter, as though in this way he could hold off too much knowledge, and perhaps hold on to these seemingly golden moments.

It was Eli’s habit in the winter months, feeling the draughty house as he did, to keep his knees covered with his woolen shawl. When his legs did not show, it was easy to forget that here sat a man badly crippled. Of course Eli himself did not forget, in one sense dwelling on it more than before, more than had been the case since freedom came. And yet with a difference, he noted this himself, as though somehow he now felt more reconciled. For one thing, although Anna spoke of it, when she called him a “cripple” it was in a natural way, as though she were calling him short or tall. It may be that Anna did think of it that way, or did for awhile, or supposed she did.

Shortly after New Year’s Day, Anna’s visits abruptly stopped. At the outset Eli would not admit the fact; he sat waiting, and when she failed to come, found a reason to explain the day’s absence. When he saw her at school, she seemed to show constraint, until her warmth and kindness reassured him. He sensed something odd in Sol’s manner, and more so in Emmy’s, when he spoke Anna’s name, until he was sure that words had passed between them. Once he asked Emmy, “Have you and Anna quarreled?”, though Emmy gruffly denied such a thing. At last Eli began to recall something that had happened in Anna’s last few visits, a fleeting expression that he had caught on Anna’s face, the look of being startled, a sudden coming to herself. It had checked his free-flowing thoughts at their source, leaving him puzzled, even hauntingly disturbed. But then she had urged him on again. This had let him forget for the time being.

The second Friday after New Year’s (this was 1866), three of the men appeared at Eli’s house asking to see him. Isaac Darrow, Tim Moore, and Dan Martin were the three, and Sol was with them and led them in.

Sol broached the matter.

"They'd like your help, Eli. They spoke to me about it."

"There are some kind of laws," Tim Moore said, "that the Secesh whites have passed down in Columbia. Out here we don't know what they are, except that white men act mighty confident. We've hinted around asking; white men don't talk. Rumors circulatin' have got our people scared; hardly anybody is signin' up to work, and white men don't seem to mind. They've been overheard to say, 'Leave them be. They'll have to come around.' We figure it's time we found out what's happenin'."

"I don't see why you come to me," Eli frowned.

"You're the teacher," Martin said. "Ain't that enough reason?"

"I'm no farmer. This is farmers' business."

"It's more than farmin', Eli," Sol said.

"Anna told us to ask you," Isaac said. "Said she knew you'd do it."

"What has got people scared," Tim said, "is a rumor that these laws will take their freedom back."

"That's more than farmin' business," Martin said.

"They can't do that," Eli said. "Whites have got no right. And the North won't let them."

"Whites down here don't ask what they've got a right to do," Isaac said. "We've got to find out about those laws."

"Then go find out," Eli said. "I still can't see why you come to me."

"You can read and make out what you're readin'," Martin said. "That's what we need."

"You see, Eli," Tim said. "We want to go to town and find out about these laws. We want to have seen them, know just what's there. If they're bad laws, as it looks like they are, then we want to figure out what we'll do out here. It's bad for our people to have to be in ignorance."

"You could bring me the laws," Eli said. "I'd read them, though I know nothin' of laws."

"That won't do, Eli," Isaac said. "We might not be able to get the laws to bring you. We might have to talk to white men, tell them we've got a right to read them, make them show us a copy."

"No," Eli said. "That I won't do."

"We figure," Tim said, "that they know you've got learnin'. They know you can make out what's written there. Here I am, just

learnin' to read. Isaac can read better, and so can Sol, but whites know they're only farmers. They might tell us one thing, and it would be another. Eli, we need you, don't you see that?"

"You could get the Elder to go with you to them," Eli said.

"The Elder ain't got time to come back out here with us," Tim said. "We need somebody right here who can explain, tell our men exactly whites' intentions."

"Likely we'll have to go to white men out here," Martin said. "Tell them we know, tell them we are free men."

"They'll hold you in respect, Eli," Tim said. "You're the teacher, they can't deny your learnin'."

Eli sat staring into his fire.

"Anna said you would do it," Isaac said again.

"It ain't that I don't want to help," Eli frowned. "But it's just not the kind of thing I know how to do."

Anna said nothing for several days. She seemed her old self, helpful and cheerful, yet she acted somehow different, and certainly he was seeing her little. Each day after school she hurried home speaking of washing or cleaning to do. This was the week when Joseph Breen and the other children from Temple's plantation missed several days. Not one appeared, until Joseph turned up late Friday morning.

The school day was moving on toward noon when eleven-year-old Joseph thrust his head in the door, then slipped in himself and found a seat. Eli spoke sharply (he thought of this, and how Anna more than once had warned him that such a manner in him "scared" the children).

"Come up here, Joseph." His raised voice brought Anna to her door. "You all haven't been to school all this week. Where are the others? Are they on their way?"

"No, sir," Joseph said.

"What's the matter, then? You all can't learn if you stay away. Don't you want to come?"

"I done slipped off," Joseph smiled up at Anna, who had come to take her stand beside Eli's table.

"Go on and tell us," Anna said.

"Yes'm, Mister Tims tell us master say we're to stay home."

"Judge Temple said you all couldn't come to school?" Eli said.

"Mister Tims say so. Give 'em all rakes, tell 'em, 'Git to cleanin' out that stable quick.' I hid, he couldn't find me nowhere. Little children scared, they stayed home. I slipped off this mornin'."

"Will he whip you, Joseph, for runnin' away?" Anna asked.

"Yes'm, maybe," Joseph grinned. "Ma's tellin' him I'm out trappin' rabbits, she's tellin' him I just hates school."

A child spoke from the back of the room.

"Master say we all got no business comin', say he whip us if he catch us comin'."

"That's Mister Blake?" Anna asked.

"Yes'm, it's Mister Blake. We aim to come."

"Pa say he bet they goin' to hold a meetin'," Arnie Judson said.

"Likely," Anna said. "But you all keep right on comin'. We'll tell the Freedmen's Bureau, it'll make whites behave."

"Don't say that, Anna," Eli murmured.

At noon time when he had sent the children outside to eat their bite, Anna came through on her way to the house. This time, however, she stopped to talk.

"What are you goin' to do, Eli?"

"Do, Anna?" He looked his surprise.

"About those children that the Judge won't let come."

"What could I do, Anna?"

"Eli." Anna's tone held an edge such as he had never heard in it before. "What you told the men the other day was wrong. You ought to help them."

"I didn't feel called upon," Eli spoke stiffly.

"It's wrong," Anna said, "to shut ears and eyes to how bothered folks are about these laws."

"I don't shut them, Anna. I would have thought . . . that's farmin' business. I tend to my school."

"All right, tend to your school. You know that children have been droppin' off lately, and it's a month or more before fieldwork picks up."

"Anna, let's stick to talkin' about Joseph."

"Then talk about Joseph. Eli, you could write the Judge a letter."

"Me write the Judge? That's crazy, Anna."

"Write him. Why not? Sayin' he's got no right to act this way, for-biddin' children from comin' to school. He'll come around. Whites know the Freedmen's Bureau will step in."

"Anna, I'd have thought you knew how I felt."

"Tell him, let them come like the others do. Whites hate to be shamed before their kind."

"Anna." Eli was speaking with an effort. "You ought not to have told the children that we'd tell the Freedmen's Bureau. It gets us into things before we know. And when you ask me to write the Judge a letter—Anna, you know how I feel toward white people! You've always said you felt that way too."

"I don't seem to feel the way you do on this. I don't believe in lettin' whites trample on us!"

"So that's what I'm doin'," Eli said slowly. "You know I want nothin' to do with white people. I don't want to go near them. I've told you how I felt, I thought you understood."

"I reckon I feel different. I'll write the letter, then. I'll sign my name. You won't get blamed—"

"No, Anna!"

"Eli, I won't sit by and do nothin'."

"If anybody writes it, I'll do it, Anna."

That night Eli sat late over the letter, trying it one way, then another. "The colored children from your place want a schooling, Judge. It cannot do harm, it is only meant for good. . . . I respectfully ask if the children cannot come from your place like they do from the others."

Early the next week the Temple place children returned, first the younger ones, then the older trickling back. Eli pressed Joseph, Anna quizzed each child in turn. Mr. Tims had merely told them that he had just been "foolin'"; when their winter chores were finished of course they could go back.

Eli had not told Anna of his letter, expecting her to ask, and feeling the rebuff. He sensed a kind of hardening in her manner, as if she almost sought to find flaws in him. She would criticize him on the least pretext, take issue with him on unimportant matters, speak of their rights and of whites' flaunting of them as though they had never talked of how he felt.

On Saturday afternoon Anna came to visit Emmy, not alone, however, as she had once done. Janie was with her. Janie was to marry Dan Martin shortly, so the women of course were conversing of this. Eli was present. Sol was at the store getting supplies, but he

had brought Eli over before he left. Eli sat, an open book on his lap, watching the flames and half-listening to the women.

It was nearly dark when Sol came in. Rain had been falling for several days, so that yard and barnyard were deeply mired. Sol, slamming the house door, slumped into a chair, and stuck his mired shoes out close to the flames. Emmy glared at Sol's shoes, but went on with her ironing.

Sol spoke presently.

"Saw the Judge, Eli."

Eli glanced at Anna. She was gazing at him.

"Told me he wanted me to tell you something," Sol stopped speaking and stared into the fire.

"Well, go on and tell him," Emmy said to Sol.

"Said he'd been waitin' to see you," Sol said. "Said you wrote him some kind of letter. Did you?"

"Yes, I wrote him," Eli said.

"Said you'd got yourself upset about nothin'," Sol said. "To tell you how children like to tell tall tales, and that he'd raised no objection to their comin' to your school. Said time would have to tell the wisdom of such things. But he'd told the overseer they could go, that they had their winter chores to do, and when they'd finished, they could go. Have they come back?"

"Yes, they've come back," Anna said to Sol. Eli did not look in her direction.

"He said more," Sol said. "Something all about mutual trust carryin' us further than schools and education. I told him yes, but they needed education. He said, 'Tell Eli, next time he wants a favor, don't write a letter, come and ask to see me.' Why didn't you go and see him? It would have been a heap better. Whites don't like colored people writin' them letters."

"It was my fault," Anna said brusquely.

"You think you could have made me?" Eli frowned at her.

"He said one thing more," Sol said. "He said, 'Tell your brother that bein' a teacher, he ought to be usin' his influence for good. He ought to be tellin' people how it's their duty to settle down and sign up for work.' So you see, Eli."

"What do I see?" Eli said gruffly.

The women stared at him.

Smell of shoe leather rose in the room.

"Sol!" Emmy said. "You're scorchin' your shoes!"

"See?" Sol burst out. "You better see soon! I tell you, they'll starve! Birch was tellin' men this very evenin' that they've got to sign up, that he can't carry them a single week longer. I've talked to them. 'You can't starve. What you goin' to do?' I ask 'em. They say to me, 'I don't know what's written in that contract. I can't read. Maybe it's so, whites are fixin' to take our freedom back. I don't dast sign.' They're so danged scared! And we don't know nothin', we're sittin' here, don't even know what's in those laws."

"Sol," Eli said. "I can't talk to whites. I hate to be near them. I wouldn't know what to say."

"You wouldn't have to talk," Emmy said. "Let the others talk. You just read those laws so the men will know."

"I tell you, I want nothin' to do with whites," Eli said.

"You can't help yourself, Eli," Anna said.

"This from you, Anna?" Eli said.

It was now as though both had forgotten the others.

"You've got to deal with them," Anna said.

"You saw what happened on that letter to the Judge."

"What's that letter got to do with these laws?" Anna said.

"I've got to do nothin' that don't seem right to me."

"And this seems wrong?" Anna said, voice rising. "Wrong for you to go to town with the men, read those laws when nobody else can do it?"

"It does seem wrong to me." Eli spoke with effort, eyes fixed on Anna's face. "The way I feel—I've tried to explain. Whites mistreat our race. It just seems like I can't go near them. I try to talk to them, find no words—I want to leave, put them out of my sight. How could I be any good to the men, feelin' like I do? And I can't help that. Anna, you used to say you knew how I felt."

"I don't say it now." Anna's mouth was tight. "Not when I see you actin' like this."

A strained silence fell on the room. For several moments, Eli stared in the fire, then he raised his eyes and looked at each one.

"Well," he said. "You all seem to think I'm wrong. I reckon I can try. All right, Sol. What I think we ought to do is see the Freedmen's Bureau agent. And then maybe see Judge Temple, if the agent tells us to."

They had to wait two days till the rain let up, and another to let swollen streams subside at the fords they must cross before driving into Clayville. And although they had made a double team of Sol's and Darrow's mules, they had trouble, so that Isaac and Tim, who went with Eli, had to climb down several times and put their shoulders to the wheels at the worst-mired places.

Isaac drove to the hitching lot behind the courthouse. Eli had asked that they try to find Baldwin, so while Tim went inquiring at Baldwin's store, Isaac went to the Freedmen's Bureau office.

Isaac and Tim had unhitched the mules, and thrown down an armful of hay for their feed. Eli, settled back in his wagon seat to wait, listened drearily to the mules' steady munching.

"Howdy, Eli."

He looked down at Willie Riggs, Vine Street saloon keeper, who gazed up at him, pale eyes blinking. Riggs stood chewing on a straw a few moments.

"I heard," he said presently, "that your colored folks out Sand Hollow way ain't signin' no contract."

"I don't know a lot about that, Mr. Riggs," Eli said.

"So you're a schoolteacher now." Riggs stood eyeing the mules. "No doubt you've got some influence with the colored out your way."

"I don't know, sir," Eli said.

"Eli," Riggs said. "I been a Union man, and never nothin' else. I spec' you know that. The Republicans—that's my Party—have done a heap for you all. I spec' you know that too."

"I don't know much politics, Mr. Riggs."

"You read the newspapers?"

"Yes, sir, when I can get one."

"I reckon you know more'n you let on. These here black code laws——"

"Mr. Riggs, out Sand Hollow way all we've heard are rumors about those laws."

"B—y cracky!" Riggs tilted his head to look at Eli. "White men could have told you all. So you don't know yet all that's in those laws that the Secesh chaps have thought up for you all?"

"That's what we've come to town about," Eli said stiffly. "I'm waitin' now to see the Freedmen's Bureau agent."

"Go and see him," Riggs said. "And take my advice, sit down and read those laws. There's nothin' they don't say. How you get up, what time you lay down, when you go a-visitin', how you can't waste your time, and for the least little thing they can take off from your pay—it's them who'll decide, you all will have no say at all. You got to sign contracts, and then the law ties you: if you break the contracts they can send you to jail. Those Seceshers have sure got smart lawyers, man. You read these here black laws, you'll learn the whites' intentions."

"The North ought not to have let them," Eli said.

"The North can't do it all," Riggs said. "Eli, do black men want their rights? Do they feel put upon by the white men?"

"Their rights?" Eli's glance flicked down at Riggs. "I don't know as I understand what you're meanin'."

"I spec' you do," Riggs drawled.

"They like to be treated right, Mr. Riggs. But they don't aim —"

"Most whites say I'm wrong," Riggs broke in, "when I tell them that. I been tellin' them, these here black laws they've fixed up so nice will learn them. Colored scared out your way, Eli?"

"They been kind of bothered, yes, sir."

"Uh-huh. You wait and see. These black laws won't be forgotten soon. They're goin' to give the white man a powerful lot of trouble."

"Mr. Riggs, we ain't lookin' for trouble with the white people."

"You won't have to look. It'll come without no lookin'."

Tim had come up as Riggs turned to go. Riggs nodded to him. Tim touched his cap.

"What did he want, Eli?"

"He says the law's bad," Eli spoke absently.

"Eli, the Elder's clear out in Black Creek district. Here comes Isaac."

"He's there," Isaac told them. "Freedmen's Bureau agent says to come on over."

The agent did not have a copy of the code.

"It's long," he said. "They've got one at the courthouse. You can go there and read it, county clerk's office."

"We'll go there," Tim said.

"I can tell you what's in it," the agent said.

"We'd like you to tell us," Eli said.

"It's going to be annulled," the agent said. "General Sessions—he commands the South Carolina district—says it's contrary to the laws of the land. He's got the authority; he's going to annul it."

"So the trouble is over?" Eli said.

"I think we ought to read the laws," Tim said.

"Let him tell us first," Eli said.

"As you see," the agent told them when he had finished. "This is hardly the way free men are treated. The intent of these laws is very plain: it's to bring the colored man under strict white control, make a serf of him. I had two white gentlemen in here today. Judge John Temple and Major Rob Abel."

"They come from out our way," Tim said.

"Then I don't have to tell you how such men feel. The Major is a man who uses strong language."

"We know him," Isaac said.

"Judge Temple seems the more temperate kind. I can see what he means when he says they feared chaos without some kind of code. He tried to explain, and I understand much better how his kind feel. After all, they have known your race for generations, and your people were indeed thrust into freedom overnight."

"Is that what they came here to tell you?" Tim said.

"They had heard rumors"—the agent eyed Tim—"that the code would be annulled. White men will take this annulment very hard. They've been counting on these laws to make things settle down. They feel that the North is interfering with their right to run this state."

"A heap o' our kind live here too," Tim said mildly.

"We don't count," Isaac grunted.

"There ought to be some way," Eli said, "for both of us to live here and leave each other alone."

"Freedmen have got to earn their living, Hill," the agent said. "They'll have to earn their bread working for white men."

"They aim to earn their bread, Mr. Rogers," Tim said.

"Then go home," the agent said. "Tell your Sand Hollow people this is what the Freedmen's Bureau says: Sign contracts now. Get back to their work."

Returning to the wagon, Eli said, "It's gettin' late."

Tim was carrying Eli. He stopped in his tracks.

"We've got to read those laws. That's what we came for."

"There's no need now," Eli said.

"You can't tell about whites," Isaac said.

"The agent's told us what's in them," Eli said.

Tim walked on toward the wagon, though in lifting Eli in, he said again, "I think we ought to go and read them."

"I can see no need to," Eli was saying, when he caught the look that had come on Tim's face. "All right. Take me to the courthouse."

The clerk glanced up when they appeared, but dropped his eyes again to the papers on his desk. They waited at the counter Eli astride Tim's back, still the clerk paid no attention, but kept on with his work.

"Set me down, Tim," Eli muttered.

Tim turned and started toward a chair. The clerk jerked up his head.

"What you niggers want?"

Tim turned back, while Isaac glanced at Tim.

"The Freedmen's Bureau agent——" Tim began.

"Why you come here?" the clerk said angrily. "Don't you know to go to Lilly's Hotel?"

"He sent us here, sir," Tim spoke slowly, though Eli could feel how his muscles stiffened. "It's a matter of some laws that we would like to read, if you would kindly let us. He said you had a copy."

"What laws you talkin' 'bout?" The clerk stared at them. "It's a fine how-d'ye-do, niggers comin' to read laws. I never thought I'd live to see such a day."

"I think, sir," Tim said, "they're called 'black codes,' something like that. We'd be pleased to see them."

"For all I know"—the clerk had risen, his face a furious crimson—"you can't rightly read. You'd go out from here claimin' things were in them that ain't there at all, you'd sell a pack of lies!"

"This crippled man, sir"—Tim's tone was still low "is a school-teacher, he can read well."

"I know the nigger!" The clerk was yelling now. "I know the things he's been up to, teachin' our darkies to think they're good as whites! Readin' and writin'! No, I tell you! Get out o' here! I'm tired of your impudence!"

"All we're askin', sir" — Tim began.

"The Freedmen's Bureau told us —" Isaac spoke angrily.

"Get out, I tell you! You and your Yankees! Thinkin' just because they could starve us to submit that we'll let them come and trample us under their dirty boots! Get out or I'll call the Sheriff in!"

They left Clayville as the winter day waned, and had scarcely gone three miles when darkness fell. While Tim drove Isaac slept, hunched up in back on the wagon floor. Eli, chin buried in his shawl, hardly spoke as the slow miles receded. He dwelt in his own thoughts, oblivious of the others, except as he found himself now and then hearing the plaintive tune that Tim kept whistling.

When they had gone a few miles Tim broke the long silence.

"Well," he said. "I reckon that's how the whites are."

Eli said nothing.

"Eli," Tim said. "Why you reckon Anna keeps puttin' me off?"

"Puttin' you off?" Eli turned and looked toward Tim, although it had grown too dark to read his face.

"I tell her she's got to make up her mind, I won't take no."

"You aim to wed her?" Eli said.

"I been after her since last autumn," Tim said. "Hadn't you guessed?"

"No," Eli said. Presently he said, his voice sounding muffled, "Maybe she ain't the marryin' kind."

"I've told her I'd get her if I had to wait till Judgment Day. I will too," and Tim once more started up his plaintive whistling.

Little was said of their fruitless journey—almost nothing to Eli. But on Sunday afternoon when the usual people came for Sabbath meeting in Sol's house, and the last tune was sung, and the final prayer was said, folks remained like people with a purpose. Eli knew full well that they wished to talk.

Martin began it.

"You all didn't read those laws."

"You know we tried to," Tim said mildly.

"He had no right to tell you to get out," Martin said.

"What would you have done?" Eli said sharply.

"We'd better talk about what we're goin' to do," old Darrow said. "Stop this here quarrelin'."

"They ain't quarrelin', pa," Anna said. "It's just Dan's way. He means no harm."

"Dan's way' is right, I reckon," Eli said angrily.

"I didn't say that." Anna's tone was quiet.

"I said to stop quarrelin'," old Darrow said. "What I want to know is, do we tell folks to sign?"

"It don't seem right," Luke Judson said, "that the Freedmen's Bureau would say we ought. It would sure tie us."

"You don't have to sign," Giles Turner said. Dan had brought Turner to Sabbath meeting.

"Don't our children have to eat?" June Sims said. "Who can give us furnish except a white man?"

"I say sign nothin'," Martin said. "Whites'll have to come around. Who but us'll do their plowin' and pickin', I ask you?"

"You ain't a field hand," June said angrily. "We don't own our farms, or work in sawmills either."

"For shame, June," Anna said.

"I work in a sawmill," Martin said, "because I get cash pay. I intend to own some land. But I'll sign nothin'. If I want to quit, I'll quit. No white man is goin' to try to jail me, sayin' I broke my contract."

"Farmin' is different, Dan." Sol spoke slowly. "You know that. You know plowin' and pickin' won't wait when time comes to do it. I don't take the whites' part, but they'd be bound to want their hands to sign for a year, so they can count on them."

"Yes," Tim said. "But, Sol, when a man binds himself for a year, whites get the whip-hand, don't they? Supposin' I sign, I'm to get a third, and I'm gettin' my furnish till cotton is ginned, and we get a drought, maybe I don't pick enough cotton to shake a stick at. I'm right there, stuck in debt. Dan's way ain't right, not many could do it. All I can see is ask cash pay by the month."

"Not many whites will do it," Isaac said. "And they can't be made to."

"I'm no farmer," Eli said. "But the Freedmen's Bureau agent said their contract was all right. And said if whites gave trouble, for a man to come to him."

"How am I to know what's in my contract?" Turner said. "Boss hands it to me, says, 'Nigger, you sign.' Few can read. I reckon I

say, 'Boss, I got to go to town, got to get Freedmen's Bureau to read what's in my contract.'" He laughed loudly.

"I been thinkin' about that," Tim said. "It's a fact what Giles says that mighty few will know what's written in their contracts. Whites may plan some tricks. The way I figure it, we can do this. People are goin' to sign, they've got to eat. But they sure ought to know what's written on that paper. We'll spread the word, All men have to do is bring their contracts to the teacher, and Eli'll read them what's written there, explain it to them——"

"No, Tim!" They stared at him. "I won't do it, Tim! I know nothin' of this business! Just because I teach the school you've got no right——" He glanced at Anna, and his voice trailed off.

"Why, Eli," Tim said. "I'd have thought you'd be willin'. All it means is to read what's written on the paper."

"You know that ain't so," Eli said bitterly. "You know like as not white men will cheat. They'll put something there to take advantage. Then what happens, tell me that?"

"Here's what happens," Martin said. "You'll go with the man, tell his boss, 'Change what you've written on this contract.' That's what the Elder does all the time."

"I ain't the Elder," Eli said. "The sooner you all learn it, the better it'll be. No, I won't go. Me, a crippled man, havin' to be toted on somebody's back!" He turned on Anna. "You thought this up. You told Tim to ask me to do it!"

"No," Anna said. "I knew nothin' of it."

"But you think I ought to do it! I'm tired of this business. I'm the teacher, you all say, so that makes me have to deal with whites. If I'd thought it meant that, do you think I'd ever have been one?"

Weeks went by, the countryside settled down as far and wide the signing went on. Soon here and yonder plows could be seen breaking ground that would be put to seed. Eli watched the season take its customary course, though his mind did not grow tranquil at this semblance of peace. Spring burst upon them. Dogwood bloomed. Purple wild violets peeped up in the woods; he knew, because his children came fetching little bunches. Eli thought to draw some pleasure from the children, that some had learned to read, and some to figure, and this was as it ought to be in the springtime. He felt nothing that

he had hoped to feel. A sense of dull drabness clouded his days, while he longed for the moment when at last school would end.

Toward the end of March Baldwin called a meeting. For some time he had been wanting something done to get more schools. A score of colored men were crowded in the little parlor, mostly artisans and preachers, with a farmer or two. Eli was the only schoolteacher present. He had longed to make excuses, yet had felt obliged to come. As the afternoon wore on, he sat self-absorbed, seemingly listless, though he felt apprehensive. A few times he had met Baldwin's eyes, and had not failed to notice their odd puzzled look.

The afternoon was well advanced when a new face appeared. A white man stood over near the hall door. Eli frowned, seeing the newcomer; he knew who it was and it made him uneasy. Baldwin had spoken many times of Ben Strong, the mountain-country man from North Carolina who had come in the autumn to start a school for freedmen's boys. And Strong had sent books for Eli's school, and had sent Eli messages, hoping to see him. Up to this time Eli had avoided Strong.

Baldwin presently asked Strong to speak. Eli's eyes swept the long lean figure.

"Yes, I want to say something," Strong had slow mountain speech. "I've got a kind of problem I'd like help on. You all know Ira Lilly."

"You mean the slave trader?" Eli's harsh tone made men turn and look.

"Yes," Strong said. "He was one not long ago. As some of you all know, the house my school is in belongs to Ira Lilly. He gave it rent free."

"You took it?" Eli said.

"I took it. What would you all have done? White men," Strong said dryly, "can be mighty curious, as no doubt you all know. Lilly is, I don't claim to understand him. Feedin' hungry freedmen; takin' their complaints to Union Army officers; givin' the Freedmen's Bureau quarters in his hotel—it can't be good for business; givin' me my school."

"Something sho' is behind it," an old Baptist preacher chuckled.

"He been up to tricks?" the Clayville blacksmith asked.

"Lilly claims he aims to help freedmen," Strong said. "Got real mad when me and Elder Baldwin showed some doubts. Said we couldn't forget that he'd been a trader; that he'd had to make his livin' same as anybody. Now here's the point. Next thing I know, the man is at my school offerin' me money to educate colored boys. The good Lord knows I need it. I've got a dozen boardin', I could sleep twenty more. His money would feed them. I asked him, why? He says, before God, he's doin' it for good, it's bad to have them ignorant. I'm mighty puzzled. Does the man feel remorse? Yet I can't make that fit, he's prosperin' too much: able to buy up land at these forced sales, and this hotel of his, his store. If what he's after is to serve himself, then next thing he'll take advantage of the colored man, and my school would take on a taint, freedmen would distrust me. I'm askin' you all what ought I to do?"

The silence was uneasy. It was Eli who broke it.

"Ain't it sufficient," his voice was deep and bitter, "that the man was our slave trader? Do we have to talk and wonder will he cheat and squeeze? Ain't it on his hands that he bought and sold our people, can he ever wipe out the stain of it? Kind deeds—they're for a wrong reason! We ought to know, who have seen him in his time, and how he came and went in his fine wagon, drivin' his slick mules, carryin' our people, nobody knows where. Why, my own father knew the trader's hand—not this trader—but another man—it don't matter—they're all alike—it's in their blood—they'll never get it out. They took my pa, we've never known where, or if he is alive. And what had he done?—tried to get freedom for himself those years long ago, and kept on tryin', and for this he was sold. I think about him, and I ask myself, what is it we look for, now freedom's come? Not to have the slave trader befriendin' us! Not bein' beholden to white men, not havin' dealings with the race that mistreats us!—I didn't mean," turning toward Strong, eyes still ablaze, "I would not speak wrongly toward any good man, whatever his skin color." He stopped abruptly.

"I'm glad you spoke," Strong said. "It's my big aim in teachin' my boys, to lean on themselves, never on the white man. They'll win their full manhood no other way."

A young man stepped out from behind other men. It struck Eli that he was very tall and straight.

"I'm soon to be ordained"—and he looked very young for one to be ordained. "One year free, and I've learned to read some. The Elder's got a church waitin' for me. It was Mr. Strong who taught me to read—we sat up nights—I worked at it by day. It was his school—though I'm not a boy—a man of twenty-one—he said it didn't matter. I say it don't matter where the money comes from! Nobody's goin' to make Mr. Strong do wrong by our race."

"That's right!" several men exclaimed.

Eli watched them as they gathered round Strong, though he felt a deep disquiet and soon turned away. Over in a corner he now saw Dan Martin who had remained aloof, unconcerned with the discussion. Martin's eyes were fastened on him and the look in them added nothing to his ease.

When the others had gone Eli remained.

"Sol can't come for awhile," he told Baldwin.

"That's all right," Baldwin nodded.

Elder, if I spoke in a wrong hasty way——"

"I don't blame you. Lilly always riles me too. I've been thinkin', though." Baldwin sat gazing through the window.

"That young man," Eli said.

"He's a fine boy."

"He'll be ordained soon?"

"Yes, next month."

"It's almost twenty years"—Eli gazed around the parlor—"since I first saw this room."

"That's right, twenty years," Baldwin said.

"I still recollect everything we said that time you gave my Bible to me. You've forgot, I reckon."

"No, I don't forget. Eli, you kind of surprised me today."

"I said I was sorry!"

"No, it ain't that. You were kind of contentious, but I like a man to speak up in meetin'. I see you've learned to. It put a notion in my head. Son, we need a preacher out at Sand Hollow."

Something like a thrill ran through Eli.

"You reckon I could?" And his eyes glowed. Though as quickly as it came the light died out. How could he do it? Despair flooded through him.

"Of course," Baldwin was saying, "a man ought to feel a call. It ain't that I'm tryin' to push you. But it struck me just now, teachin' has changed you, you've come out a lot. Yes," he said with enthusiasm. "Eli, I believe the Lord has called you! Now you go right home and pray, see if I ain't right. And here I've been puzzlin' how to get my Sand Hollow church started."

Succeeding days brought no ease to Eli. His thoughts kept up a swinging back and forth. Does a man feel a call when he does not feel able? How different it would be if he had never been lame, making him a different man altogether. Then the still small voice might have sounded—or was he hearing it, uncertain though he felt? He would think of Elijah and how it came to him. *And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains.* Morning after morning he looked forth from his doorway, seeing old King's Mountain looking high and far away. March winds blew strong; no doubt, he told himself, a big strong wind was blowing up there.

Eli was not left alone with his problems. The word got around, spread he knew not how, that the teacher was weighing a call to be their minister. People were galvanized. A church of their own—it was not a prize to be let go without an effort. Folks began to drop around to argue and weigh. Eli tried to stop them, excusing his brusqueness on the ground that such a matter lay between a man and God. They ignored his withdrawal, or were unaware of it, and pressed him the harder as they saw him hesitate. Few evenings passed without a knock at his door.

They took it for granted that the teacher had a call. Why would he not—a learned, good man? And that he only wondered could he do the work, a man so lame that he had to be carried. So that this was what they argued. He could sit to preach, and sit to pray. He could sit to baptize—it was not like the Baptists who said that a sinner had to be dipped to wash his sins away; being Methodist, he had but to wet his hand and touch the converted. He could visit the sick, for after all he traveled to school. He could bury the dead, have a chair set beside the open grave, say the good things to be said for the dead, and bless the body as it was let down—reach down his hand for the clod of earth and drop it on the coffin, "Dust to dust." He could wed people, for was any more required than to sit in his

chair and say words over them? What could he not do?—they rang the changes on it, pleased and proud. Men, hands outspread, smiled warm and friendly smiles. “Can’t you see? Teacher, you can do it.” Women, haunting his door, some wistful, some almost peremptory, told him, “It’s the Lord’s will, I been prayin’ for it.” Eli tried to return in kind, for he could see that those who came meant it in good part, although their much talking left him weary and sore.

People did not dwell long in this first stage. Within a fortnight they had leaped ahead to assume that the matter was happily decided. They now possessed a preacher, even though not full-fledged, since this would have to wait till the laying-on of hands. To Eli’s distress, some began to use the name, women at first, then men falling in. They did it in an affectionate way—affection for him, and affection for the title. “Preacher.” “Preacher Hill.” Eli could protest, “It’s not settled yet.” They ignored his words and continued, well content.

Baldwin allowed a full month to go by. Almost with apprehension, Eli saw him enter.

“You been sick?” Eli’s face had grown thinner.

“I’m all right, I reckon.”

“Well.” Baldwin gave him a friendly pat, and spread his big frame on the bench across from him. “I’ve come to find out if you’re ready.”

“Do you have nobody else you could send here, Elder?”

“Eli, you know a man has got to live. I’ve got nobody who could make his livin’ out here while he preached. I know you’re dedicated, the Lord will help you. You can best fill the place.”

“I can’t be sure.” He took up his prizestick and prodded the ashes.

“The Lord knows best what He’s doin’. If He calls a cripple——”

“It’s not just because I’m lame.”

“I can see nothin’ else standin’ in your way.”

“I’ve still got some things to straighten out in my mind.”

“You’ll get them straight. You don’t have to wait on that.”

“I don’t know what I ought to feel toward white people.”

“That don’t need to stand in your way,” Baldwin said. “There’s plenty you can do that’ll make you feel better. Why, people are comin’ to me every day, ‘Elder, my boss is mistreatin’ me.’ I say, ‘Come right along, we’ll talk to him, take him to the Freedmen’s Bureau, if need be.’ You’ll see, you won’t lack ways of makin’ whites do right, son.”

"I reckon I don't look at things just like you do."

"That's all right. I don't bother. You preach the Gospel, that's the big thing."

"I ain't sure all the things you do are a preacher's duty, Elder."

"They sure ain't," Baldwin smiled. "Though I spec' you'll find you can't help yourself. Folks kind of make you. I sure know."

"I want to be a preacher, but I've got to feel I'm tryin' to be right in my heart. How else can I feel a call, Elder?"

"You've got to do what the Lord requires, Eli." Baldwin sat frowning. "Haven't I known you a good many years? You wouldn't want to wait, would you, till you'd ironed out all that seemed wrong with yourself? You better remember what the Lord said to Job, answering him out of the whirlwind? *Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man.* Son, you've got to put your hand to the plow."

"And not even know how to plow a straight row?"

"Quit worryin', you'll do fine. Had you thought, Eli," he said, "that for a church you all can use your schoolhouse? It's a heap better than my old store ever was."

"Yes," Eli said. "I'd thought of the schoolhouse."

"My new church buildin' is almost ready, son. We'll be meetin' in it in another month."

"That's good," Eli said absently.

He was seated in his doorway the evening Anna came, so that he could see her as she swung around the bend, a tall woman, with an easy free stride; her long full skirts, caught by a steady breeze, pressed against her thighs and swayed out behind her. He expected her to turn toward Emmy's house; instead she came directly to his step. She took her seat below him, settling back, head against the doorframe. It was like the former time, except then it had been winter, so that they had been inside.

"Emmy's in her house," he heard himself say, and wished he had not spoken.

"I know," she said.

They sat in silence, while the shadows grew longer. He found himself hoping that Sol would be late coming from his plowing.

"Eli," she said, "ain't you goin' to do it?"

"I want to," he said. Their voices were low, blending with the evening quiet.

"You can do it, you know. I know you can." She gave a half-laugh. "All you have to do is preach like you talk. They'll listen."

"It ain't the preachin', Anna, that mostly bothers me."

"You don't feel able?"

"That's partly it. Maybe I don't know exactly what I feel—I think I know, then it slips away from me. Except I feel something holdin' me back. . . . Don't I have to find my peace before I do it?—and I can't do that! I'm torn within myself."

"Maybe you'd find it once you said you'd do it."

"Anna, you know how I feel toward whites. It's wrong, and I can't seem to know what's right. Though I know that fightin' and contendin' won't change them. All it will do is harden their hearts. No power on earth that I can see will change them. It's goin' to take the power of Almighty God."

"It ain't wrong, Eli, to want to take up for your people. Preachin' will let you, it'll give you a big chance."

"A preacher's business, Anna, is to save his people. I want to do that, but I've got to feel I'm called."

They sat awhile longer, both self-absorbed, until they heard Sol's wagon pulling slowly up the road.

"I'll go see Emmy," Anna said.

Eli's eyes followed her across the yard.

Eli was ordained in May of '66, a brilliant, not-to-be-forgotten day, air soft, and sky the kind of azure blue that southern skies can sometimes be. While beneath like a speck on the vastness of things, their wagon could be seen taking its way home the long slow miles from the Elder's church.

He was quiet and sober in succeeding days, nor did he show distress at his first faulty preaching. In the past he had been known to say that a man who was called could count on the Lord to provide needful words, and no doubt he clung awhile to this faith. However, Sabbath Days came and went, until weeks had passed since his laying-on of hands, still Eli remained timid in his preaching, halting in speech, a proper after words. Moreover, his flock was a weight not

a lift. It was the busy season in the fields at this time; daybreak to dark was the span of people's toil; so that although their pleasure in the new church brought them out, they were body-sore and weary. Eli's face began to wear a strained look, as a lost man's might who yet pushed on.

At last something happened. Not that Eli made it known, as if to speak of it might bare too much, though in time he came to allude obscurely to some kind of bargain he had struck, and a voice, or a light, that had flooded through him, saying, *Sin no more. Rise up and walk.*

The last Sunday in June he broke a piece of news, one plainly unexpected, given what had gone before. He raised his bowed head from the prayer before his sermon, and, pushing on his chair arms, lifted himself. When he spoke his voice was no longer weak and fumbling, but loud and distinct. It rang through the place.

They would have a revival. Right here in their church. The first Sand Hollow revival—it could not be delayed—not with all those unconverted like a burden on their souls. Then let them all pray and watch and prepare. Pray for the preacher!—it was almost a shout—for a mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

For the moment the room was electrified.

Each week brought protracted meeting closer, nor were they idle weeks for those concerned. By early July prayer meetings were in swing, those preparatory times held around in people's cabins. Eli himself could rarely attend, housebound as he was in this busy time, when Sol's mule perforce must be saved for the steady grind of plowing. Eli spurred his deacons, Luke Judson and June Sims; many weekday evenings they drove their tired bodies to make the rounds, lest a slackening occur in the pace of prayer meetings. Now could be heard eager speculative talk, fields and roadsides were rife with it. How many would be saved? Would some hardened sinners come, this one, that one? As August drew closer, Eli felt a quickening, Sabbath meeting had begun to freshen with it—a subdued expectation, excited undercurrent—while glances of wonderment were turned on him, who had altered so much before their very eyes.

Revival began the second Sunday in August. People arrived to find a change in the room. Eli had had Sol build a high platform,

and a low pulpit on it that his chair could sit behind. So that now the preacher sat high above his flock, visible as he never had been hitherto, all of him except of course his shriveled legs; these were hidden by the broad solid pulpit.

Eli leaned toward his people, lining off the tune, and their voices rolled forth in response to his. He picked up his Bible, not really to read, for he knew by heart the verses he had chosen.

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation. . . . For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, of which we speak . . .

He read through the Scripture chapter, shut the Book, resting his hand on it a moment. He threw back his head, eyes on the ceiling, then, closing his eyes, began to pray. A few began to sway, some dropped on their knees, mounting tension gripped the listening crowd. His prayer ended, Eli leaned forward, pushing on the chair arms, raising himself. Eyes blazing, he swept the people, seeming to see through them and beyond.

“Saved by the Blood!”—they were caught up and suspended, held enthralled as he poured out his message. “Repent, repent!” The old schoolhouse rang with it, and pleas of sinners, and cries of the saved.

When it was over, folks milled around the pulpit. “Lord bless you, Preacher!” “I never heard the like!” Eli for a moment seemed taken aback, as if he had yet to catch up with himself. Then a great elation overtook him; his eyes glowed, his face began to shine, as though he drank of some intoxicating potion—babel of voices—his praises pouring out.

From that hour he faltered no longer. A dam had burst somewhere within. His words, pouring forth, tripped over each other in the fervor and conviction of his evangelizing. News of his revival swept through the district, out in to the county, and into Clayville. He extended it once, then a second time, and still sinners came, and his conversions mounted. For two whole weeks he continued it.

The months went by. Eli’s church grew, and he grew with it in his drawing power. He had shed like a coat his old diffident way. The zeal of soul-winning was on him now. Also a sureness—each Sabbath saw it strengthened—saw his confidence mount as if it fed

on success—or a man being weighed who felt himself not wanting, who could not doubt that he did the Lord's work.

Sol and Emmy were plainly proud of Eli, although Sol's pleasure was a tongue-tied thing, at most a nod and pleased smile at the acclaim, but he threw around Eli a new solicitude. Emmy, however, joined the multitude. Lavish in her praise, she recounted what she heard, and bustled and fretted to see him worn out, and scolded when he risked exposure to bad weather.

Eli himself showed little concern. Where once his old trouble had been a threatening thing, the swelling joints in the rainy winter season, the pains down his side, sometimes deep colds, he now looked a well man, neither thin nor heavy, but his body slim and readied as a runner's ought to be. And he preached like a runner, defiant of his lameness. He sat in his high pulpit gazing down on his flock, thick-packed so that no spare space could be seen where another might have pressed and pushed his way in. And presently his eyes began to glow, and he to raise himself in his now characteristic way, as if by main strength he would stand upright, while he poured forth his exhortation, "Sinner, repent!"

On a Sunday morning in the spring following Eli's first revival, the spring, that is, of 1867, Dan Martin afoot appeared late for preaching, Giles Turner with him. Eli saw their approach—the school-house door was open; eyes on the out-of-doors, he was lining off the hymn. Janie Darrow, who was Martin's wife now, had told Eli before preaching, "Dan'll be late. He's been off on a trip." Eli noticed that Dan was hanging back from the building, though his eyes were glued on it as a man's are who waits; and he noticed how Giles Turner gesticulated and pointed toward the schoolhouse, as if arguing with Dan. Eli called the next line but his mind had been diverted. The sense of consecration that he liked to feel as he approached the moment of preaching had deserted him. He was feeling irritation.

At last the closing prayer had been said and the first men were making their way outside. Eli, still seated on his high platform, was reaching down shaking hands with those who crowded up when he saw Dan Martin come bounding over and begin to pull at several of the men.

"Come yonder quick," Eli heard Martin say. "We've got big news! Tell everybody, come!"

Martin strode off to where Turner waited and men began to follow, at first in a trickle, but then the trickle swelled to a stream. And those inside, both men and women, seeing that something was afoot, began to push and press to get through the door. Eli sat behind his pulpit, a frown on his face, till Sol came to carry him out to the wagon.

Fifty yards from the schoolhouse, Martin stood, waiting for the crowd to gather close. Murmurs arose. "Everybody's here!" "Tell us, Dan!"

Beads of sweat glistened on Martin's face, and he seemed to pant a little as if out of breath. His deep rumbling voice sounded hoarse when he spoke.

"We've got the vote!" It came in a shout.

Men stood staring, uncomprehending.

"Reconstruction law been passed!" Martin's big voice boomed it out. "Blue coats are comin' back, goin' to keep the whites in hand! We goin' to vote just like whites have always done! And there're a heap more of us, so we can win. We can make a constitution that'll give us our rights. You all hear me? WE GOT THE VOTE!"

"Hurrah!" a man yelled.

"Hur—rah!" came the shout, as with a great voice the crowd took it up.

Confusion and shouts mounted higher as men jerked and pushed to get in close. And the womenfolk, who had been hanging back, now pushed against the men and added their shrill voices. Little children's cries were mingled with their folks'.

Sand ruts were deep in the tracks that led from the schoolhouse to the main roadway. Although Sol's wagon wheels made a grinding sound as the mule pulled the wagon slowly along, no one heard the noise, or heard the wagon's creak as it came to a halt where the crowd blocked its passage.

"IT'S THE SABBATH DAY!"

Heads jerked around, the crowd swayed, bodies turned, facing Eli. Chins uplifted, people stared at the preacher where he sat high above them on his wagon seat. His blazing eyes were fixed on Martin.

"The seventh day is the Sabbath. It's to be kept holy. I come from meetin', what do I hear?—Shouts, exhortin'—not in praise of the Almighty!"

"We've got the vote, Eli." Martin's face was sullen.

"Is that a reason to profane the Sabbath day? Yes, I heard what you been tellin' people—tellin' it with hate in your heart!"

"They need the vote, they need their rights!" Martin shouted.

"On the Lord's Day, Dan Martin, they need the Word of God—you ought to know that—you a saved man!"

The two men glared at one another, almost, it seemed, oblivious of the crowd. Martin's face was contorted by a rising anger, while Eli, whose own face showed feelings that few there had ever seen on it before, bore the look of a man who faces an enemy. The two remained thus for a long tense moment.

At last Martin whirled and strode toward the woods. Giles Turner followed, and a few other men. The thick undergrowth soon hid them from view.

The abashed crowd had uttered not a word, until now, when a woman called loudly, "You sho' is right, Preacher!"

An old man pushed his way to the wagon. Taking off his hat, he touched his forelock in the old plantation way.

"We're mighty sorry, Preacher. We just plain forgot."

"It's all right." Eli reached down and patted him. "I don't blame you all. It ain't your fault."

Sol had been sitting, eyes fixed on his mule. He picked up the reins and called sharply to Jim.

"Git in this here wagon!" And he looked toward Emmy, nodding rudely.

Emmy stepped from the street. Moving with slow deliberation, she climbed on the wheel hub and stepped in the wagon. In back behind Sol stood an old chair. She arranged her skirts precisely and took her seat.

"I'm ready," she said loudly. Her eyes were veiled, but her hard-set mouth showed how she seethed.

People drew back from the narrow sand track, and as the wagon started up began to call their goodbyes.

Eli was responding in hearty tones when he noticed a group standing to one side, the Darrows, all of them. The old man was there, and

Anna, and Isaac, though Isaac had his back turned, and Janie, whose eyes were also turned away in the direction of the woods that had swallowed up her husband. Tim Moore was standing by Anna's side.

Eli's eyes encountered Tim's, and he glanced at Anna, then back at Tim. The wagon's slow roll—the sand was heavy, and the mule feeling sluggish on this pleasant day—gave him time to spare to see Tim's face, and to make out the odd look Anna gave him. More than one feeling struggled on Anna's face, as though she had been caught unawares and found herself baffled, or else dismayed. As for Tim, what made Eli's eyes turn back to him and search his face again was the absence of expression: Tim's face showed nothing, the first time that Eli had ever seen that look of Tim's directed at him. Uncertainty welled up in him, such a feeling of unsureness as he had not known since before his revival.

That night Eli had drifted off to sleep when suddenly he awoke, strangely distraught. For awhile he lay with eyes closed, thinking to dispel the oppressive feeling, even turning on his side to go back to sleep.

No doubt the effort banished sleep, for although he lay still wooing drowsiness, thoughts began to knock on the door of his mind. Sighing, he opened his eyes.

He opened wide his eyes and stared into the night, mustering to his aid his conscious powers. Wrestling, his mind said, wrestling with the Lord, even as Jacob wrestled in the long ago; though Jacob would not let the one go with whom he wrestled until he was blessed.

Lord . . .

So he put it in his mind, it seeming easier to be talking matters out, so began and continued his thoughts.

After nearly three months the men came to Eli. This was still the year 1867, the year of the drought, when hot parched air made nights as well as days a burden to endure.

Before they came Eli had chanced to speak to Sol, calling to him as he came from his plowing. Sol had appeared in Eli's doorway, shoulders drooping, sweat-streaked face overlaid with dust.

"I've got my chores to do"—speaking gruffly so that Eli in turn had been gruff in his speech, a not-unusual happening in these recent months: there had been this constraint since that April Sunday.

"Sol, this Union League I hear of—are the men settin' up one in Sand Hollow? I think it's wrong."

"Listen, Eli." Sol's face had grown set. "Have you got to nag me? I'm plumb tuckered out. You ain't give me time even to put my mule away. I've been plowin' since break o' day. I can't stand here arguin' the matter. Let me get my chores done, get some victuals in my belly. Anyhow, I'm tellin' the truth, right now I don't give a good damn whether Sand Hollow has a Union League or any other kind of league. All I want is to get a few more pound o' cotton than it looks like I'll have, a few more ears o' corn—it's so blamed stunted. Two years o' this—where'll I get my credit? If I don't we'll starve. Leave me alone—I just can't worry about nothin' else."

"I think it your duty——"

"Have I tried to tell you what your duty was? I've had my notions, but I've kept them to myself."

A half hour later the men trooped to Eli's door. Sol, moreover, came leading them in. Old Simon Darrow, Isaac, Tim Moore, Dan Martin, even Luke Judson, Eli's deacon.

Old Darrow spoke.

"We aim to hold a meetin' in the schoolhouse, Eli."

"What's the meetin' for?" Eli said.

"We figured," Darrow said, "that while you ought not to mind, we'd rather tell you beforehand."

"What's the meetin' for, don't anybody know?"

Martin growled something. Tim Moore gripped his arm.

"We know all right," Tim spoke. "Truth is, Eli, we'd like to have you with us. We sure hate to seem to be contendin' with you."

"How can it be contendin' when I'm told nothin'?"

"You didn't want to hear," Isaac blurted.

"Hush up, Isaac," old Darrow said.

"Then let me tell you now," Tim continued. "I reckon you know there's a Union League."

"I've heard some such name."

"Union soldiers began it. Now it's come down here to help us get ready for the votin'. Eli, we need the League. It means good, you could be for it. It holds to the flag, it's for the Constitution, it has Bible readin'. Men take an oath promisin' to be loyal Union men. You are for all those things, Eli."

"I've heard the League was secret."

"That's white talk!" Martin said.

"It's true, though," Tim said. "Meetings are secret so whites won't know if their hands belong. They're so riled up about this votin'"

"You know," Eli said, "where you're headed—clashes—violence. Your way is wrong, doin' evil for evil, it won't change white mens' hearts."

"Do you know where you're headed?" Martin spoke angrily. "Why can't you act like the Elder does? 'Hold up your heads,' that's what he preaches, 'you've got rights. Be men.'"

"They'll hold up their heads if they get a change of heart. Don't you understand, the Lord called me to preach salvation—I swore an oath—he sent me a sign. I know I'm right. You can't tempt me, Dan."

"It's not temptin'. You've changed. When freedom came, who talked more than you of what it would bring? Who spoke more than you of whites' evil ways—I've heard you, right here in this room—"They mistreat, I'll have nothin' to do with them"—that's how you talked."

"I did hope. And whites' ways are evil. But I was called, Dan. Of course I changed. I had to change—I couldn't go on steeped in the sinful feelings I harbored. That's what you all don't understand. You all turned away from me when I tried to do right. I still seethe at whites' deeds, I still hate to be near them. But I been tryin' to learn to act Christian toward them, don't you see?"

"So you want them sayin', 'He's a *good* nigger preacher!'"

"Dan!" Tim said.

"I can't help what white men say, Dan. '*Men shall revile you . . . say all manner of evil falsely. . .*' I can't let that turn me from my callin'. A man has got to go by what his conscience tells him."

"That's right." Old Darrow rose. "We've done had it out with our 'n, and we're holdin' that there meetin', come Friday night. It'll be in the schoolhouse when darkness drops. We'd like to have you come, but if you won't you won't."

"Now, old man," Tim said.

"I'll be goin'," Martin growled.

Tim watched Martin leave, then eyed the smoking lamp.

"Eli, listen." He hesitated. "Folks been tellin' us, 'Wait, let the preacher give the sign. Few will come without him. Get him to come, they'll put their trust in it.'"

"I reckon you've forgot, Tim. Revival is comin'!"

"The League don't aim to hinder, Eli."

"Then put off your League till after revival."

"We can't do that," Tim said. "Registration for the votin' comes in September. We've got to get members, hold meetings, explain. There's not enough time as it is."

"That's what I mean. Your mind's on nothin' but this League business. Luke, right this minute, not at his prayer meetin'!"

"I meant to go, Eli." Luke sounded troubled. "They said to come here. Anyhow, I wanted you should know I'd do your way."

"You all have no right drawin' off people's minds. If you'll put off the League I'll put nothin' in its way. But if you go interferin' with revival——"

"I done had enough!" old Darrow stalked out.

"Wait a minute, pa," Isaac called. "I'm comin'!"

"Well, Eli." Sol spoke for the first time. "I'd just like you to know, I'm goin' to that meetin'!"

"I reckon," Tim sighed, rising slowly to his feet, "that we've said all we know to say. We sure wish you'd help us, Eli."

"It's you all, Tim, who ought to help me."

"We want to, Eli. We aim to do both."

"You'll see I'm right, that you ought to have waited."

When the others had left, Luke still kept his seat, though soon he also rose and said goodnight. For awhile Eli sat where they had left him, though presently he made his slow way to his door. He could hear Emmy's step over in his brother's house, and hear Sol's loud groan, complaining of his weariness. Soon the glow of their lamp went out, still Eli remained, sometimes his eyes on the million stars, sometimes on the fireflies darting here and yonder.

3

Lion . . . Ravenous Beast



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1

It was September 1870 in the upcountry of South Carolina, three years and a little more since the day when the men that Eli Hill had known best had turned from his door, they going their way, leaving him to go his. The night of the seventh was extremely dark, the sky overclouded, so that not a peep of light came through from the moon sailing in its course in the hidden sky. June Sims stumbled. Eli drew a sharp breath from where he perched astride June's back, and heard June mutter, "My foot hit a rock." Eli murmured, "Take the side door, June. Maybe the Elder has a light in his kitchen." And they now saw a faint gleam of light, as from a candle well away from the window. June's foot touched the step. Eli heard the door swing open with a swish.

"That you, Mr. Strong?" It came in a whisper.

"It's me, Elder," Eli said.

"Sh—h," from the doorway.

"What's come over him?" June muttered.

Baldwin gripped June's elbow firmly.

"I'll lead you. Take him in the parlor. I didn't expect you for awhile, Eli." He directed June, "Sit him here. Dan hasn't got here yet."

"What's goin' on, house in darkness? Dan in some trouble?" Eli spoke sharply.

Footsteps sounded in the hallway. Baldwin appeared, shading a candle. Standing aside, he let Martin, a heavyset, extremely dark man, enter the room. Turner came behind him.

"I'll be back," Baldwin said softly. "I'm waitin' on the porch. Ben Strong's comin'."

Using his hands, Eli arranged his crippled legs and leaned back. He could scarcely see June now seated across the room. He had not long to wait.

"I'd like to see that note," Martin said.

"I'll bring him in," Baldwin said.

For a few moments the only sound was the squeak of Martin's chair as he moved his heavy body.

Eli spoke across the darkness.

"What's the Elder so scared about?"

"The Elder don't scare," Martin said.

"I been away since early August holdin' revivals. I hadn't heard of your trouble," Eli said.

"The Elder says you wanted to see me," Martin said.

"Yes." Eli spoke with deliberation. "I spec' more than ever now. It's about the course you've been takin'. Dan, it's wrong. This has been on my mind for weeks. I find my conscience won't let me keep silent, though it ain't my wish to mix in these matters."

"Then why mix in just to tell us we're wrong?"

"Dan, I've come in a Christian spirit."

"You've come," Turner hissed, "just to please the whites."

"Shut up, Giles. Leave me to talk," Martin growled.

"Up to now, Dan, I've held my peace," Eli said. "Even though you all went ahead with the Union League, I put nothin' in the way of it."

"Except to stay out, so that it stayed weak. You lifted not a hand back in '68. You know we nearly lost that election."

"I knew what you were plannin' then, Dan, I didn't interfere. Let you bring your men marchin' to the polls that day, riskin' a clash. Watched you come, I was there votin', though you'd said I wouldn't go—I render to Caesar, Dan, things that are Caesar's. I said nothin', though I could have stopped you."

"And if we hadn't done it," Martin said, "got the men out, where'd we be now? Whites in control of this county. If we hadn't fought tooth and nail that time, they'd be in control of this state today. Why have we got our own Constitution? Why are our own men makin' our laws? Why're you gettin' paid for your teachin'? Why are new schools goin' up all over?"

"Did you think I didn't know what you told me, Dan, the time Rob Abel had his Home Guard patrollin'? Did you think I didn't see loaded guns in people's houses—and hear them repeatin' Dan Martin's name? Even then, I held my peace, though I knew where the road you were takin' would lead."

"You held your peace about some other things," Martin said. "Rob Abel standin' right here on courthouse steps that day, tellin' whites,

‘Stop crawlin’ on your bellies, stop talkin’ compromise, stop givin’ up your birthright to black scum, the offscourings of the human race? Does the Elder say nothin’? He stands up in that crowd, ‘You’re speakin’ of citizens of this state,’ he yells, so that every black man on the edges can hear. And they hold up their heads, they know they are men!”

“When what you all did brought the Regulators out, Dan ——”

“What we did is what kept them off. We won! ——”

“Sh—h.” They heard Baldwin at the window. “I can hear you all clear out on the porch.”

“They thought,” Martin muttered, “their night ridin’ would scare us. They quit soon enough when we’d won that election. And they’ll quit again ——”

“And Ira Lilly,” Eli said. “Such a man on our side. Slave trader, one who bought and sold. You electioneered for him. He sittin’ in Columbia. Senator Lilly—it fills me with shame. But I did not speak out in condemnation of you, though I could have throwed up, it made me so sick!”

“So you’d rather have had the whites in the saddle, ridin’ roughshod,” Martin said.

“Republicans had other men they could have put up.”

“Then why didn’t you step in and use your influence? I don’t like Lilly. But our side had to win.”

“What you goin’ to do,” Turner broke in shrilly. “Come out for the white side?”

“Yes,” Martin said. “Join the ‘Union Reform’?—We been hearin’ that the Judge was after you.”

“Sure, they’ve got some turncoat Republicans,” Turner said.

“Union Reform!” Martin said. “Secesshers, Democrats, that’s all they are!”

“Next we hear, he’ll be shoutin’ for his old master,” Turner said.

“He’s got to make his choice,” Martin said. “Did you know they’re runnin’ Rob Abel against Lilly? All right, Preacher, which are you for?”

“You all have got no right to speak to Eli that way.” June’s protesting voice drifted to them through the dark.

“It’s all right, June. They’ve got a right to speak. Now I’m goin’ to say what I came here to say.” Eli struck the floor a sudden blow with his stick. “The trouble is your militia, Dan.”

"You all got to be quiet!" Baldwin whispered through the window.

"I'm captain of my company by the Governor's own order," Martin said. "You, nor anybody else, has got a right to interfere."

"Now you're captain under Ira Lilly's orders," Eli said. "Yes, I heard today what has happened. Ira Lilly made colonel of militia. Upcountry companies answerable to him. That's why I sent for you. The man can't be trusted. He wants to rouse the whites—he don't care what happens. And now I been hearin' what you plan to do—I reckon Ira Lilly thought it up. Don't do it, Dan. I've come to ask you not to do it."

"What are you meanin'?" Martin's voice sounded muffled.

"The Democrats' rally, takin' your company. You know there'll be a clash. Stay away, Dan."

"You've heard it wrong. But how did you hear?"

"He's no doubt got a spy in the company," Turner said.

"No, I don't spy," Eli said. "I'll tell you how I heard, Dan. Arnie Judson was laughin' and talkin'."

"Young blabbermouth," Martin said. "I'll teach him a lesson. Listen, Eli, all we goin' to do is take the band, no others goin'. We'll take no guns. Just play a few tunes, drown out their speeches. They're tellin' those lies about Naegle's speech last week —"

"Dan, is it so? Did Naegle say in that speech, 'If whites misuse you, lay waste in ashes'?"

"Who you been listenin' to this time, Preacher? White men's lies. It'll pay 'em back good if we drown out their speeches."

"Did Ira Lilly," Eli said, "tell you all, 'Drill, drill; learn to use your guns; we'll guard those polls, keep the white side from cheatin'; black men are as good as whites' —?"

"Well, ain't we?" Turner sneered.

"Do we look to the slave trader," Eli said, "to tell us so?"

"You," Martin said. "All over this county, holdin' revivals that people flock to. Man, you've got power, and you say nothin'. At least the slave trader tells us, 'Stand up, act like men!'"

"Dan!—No, I won't be angered. And I'm goin' to say what I came here to say. Dan, I warn you. Give up your guns, give up your drillin'. Do it anyhow till elections are over."

"Eli," Martin spoke in slow angry tones. "I've got one thing to say to you. You've got no right to tell us what to do while you stand aside, not come in and help. All these years —"

"Yes, I've known what you thought all these years. And now I don't know if I'm wrong or right to speak—I'd thought it wasn't right for a minister of God. I find that I can't any longer keep silent. Your way is wrong, Dan. If you keep on with your drillin', it's bound to mean clashes, bound to bring bloodshed. The whites won't take it. They'll begin to shoot, they'll begin to do something, no tellin' what."

"Eli." Martin's voice had a queer note. "Ain't you heard yet what's goin' on?"

"What you talkin' bout?" June spoke quickly.

"What whites are doin'?" Martin said. "You all heard nothin'?"

"I reckon"—Eli spoke slowly—"I don't know exactly what you mean."

"Ain't you been wonderin' why the Elder's house is dark? You mean you really thought I was in some kind of trouble?"

"Well, I'm waitin'," Eli said. "Why don't you go on and tell me what you know?"

"You ain't heard," Martin said, "about these disguised men?"

"I heard Regulators had started up again," June whispered. "Over somewhere in York County. I just thought it was rumor."

"You all hadn't heard," Martin said, "that Black Creek's schoolhouse was burnt to the ground?—two nights ago?—disguised band set it afire? They were seen at the business, dressed up in their robes?"

"What else," Eli said harshly. "I tell you, I'm waitin'."

"You didn't know," Turner said, "that just last night three colored men were whipped not fifteen miles west of here?—houses broken into, men dragged out?—whites disguised—even horses covered—couldn't tell how many?"

"And you're tellin' us," Martin said, "to give up our guns, give up our militia, the only thing we've got—Sh—h, I hear somebody, maybe Ben Strong. They left a note on his porch last night."

A quick step sounded on the gravel path that circled the house.

"That you, Elder?" a low voice said.

"I'm here, Ben. We'll go inside."

Steps in the hall. Baldwin spoke from the doorway, the candle he held lighting up his face.

"Ben Strong's here."

"Come in, come in." Martin spoke sharply. "I want to see that note. Did he bring it with him?"

"I brought it," Strong said, following Baldwin in.

"Keep your voices down," Baldwin said softly.

"What time did they come?" Martin said.

"I was away. It woke my wife. She figured around one o'clock."

"Didn't know how many?" Martin said.

"No, she heard horses, but they were well away down the road."

"The note?"

"Stuck under my front door. She found it there."

"Read it to me," Martin said.

Baldwin shaded the candle.

"Printed by somebody's hand," Strong said. "'Order No. 2,' it says. 'Notice! Scalawag traitors won't be tolerated any longer in this county. We give you plain warning! Stop polluting our clean God-fearing air with your Radical atheistic views. Shut down your nigger school. Get out! Stay out! By Order'—with some kind of hocus-pocus talk, then signed—'K. K. K.'"

"Nothin' to say what the letters mean?" Martin said.

"Just K. K. K.," Strong said. "Though I been hearin' a crazy-soundin' name goin' round, somethin' like 'Ku-Klux.'"

"Yes," Martin said. "I've heard it too."

"What are you goin' to do?" Eli's voice was as though it floated in the shadowy room.

"Do?" Strong said. "What you mean, 'do'?"

"He means," Turner said, "are you goin' to 'get out'?"

"No." Eli broke the heavy silence. "And, Giles, you'd better let me do my own speakin'. I mean can't we stop this outbreak of violence? Can't we get at the trouble before it's too late?"

By arrangement, Luke Judson called for Eli next day, to drive him home after his long absence. Luke was carrying Eli down the steps, and the Elder and his wife were standing on the porch, June was already waiting in the wagon, when the messenger arrived from Judge John Temple. He would like Eli to come to his law office directly.

Eli glanced at Baldwin, whose eyes were elsewhere, and at Baldwin's wife, who was straightening a chair. Being on Luke's

back, he could not see Luke's face, and he made no attempt to look in June's direction.

"Tell him I'll come," he said in gruff tones, eyes following the boy, who went trotting off.

All Baldwin said was, "God bless you, son," saying it with an absent air. The wagon rattled off, still Luke did not speak, nor had he spoken when they reached the Judge's office. Luke was the one who carried Eli in, and left him, while he went to wait with June. The Judge sat tapping fingertips on his table, and then began to talk in a tight judicious voice.

Eli was weary. He had held four revivals, driving long distances, since August began. He had scarcely closed his eyes in the night just ended; mind and body aching, he had tossed till dawn. Now his mind was unresponsive, no matter how he prodded; it felt sluggish, remote, as if detached from himself. He could hear Temple speaking, and hear his own thoughts, but his tongue felt thick, his eyes heavy. This was so when the Judge first began to talk.

Presently Eli began to comprehend what it was the Judge was heading toward. He thought he did. And if he had ever heard a bell buoy tolling out for rocks, he'd have called it this that was sounding in his head, a warning toll. He summoned all his powers to ready himself, to have his wits alert, to know what he was doing.

"... white and black," the Judge was saying, "can't live here lined up against each other. We've got to find a peaceful way. You know that, Eli."

Eli moved restlessly in his chair.

"I'm convinced, knowing your race like I do, that by nature they're temperate, they're a tractable people. By themselves, they wouldn't run to extremes."

"Judge, all we want —," but Temple went on speaking.

"They've been misled." Temple's manner grew cold. "Rascals, unscrupulous politicians, extremists, have grabbed power in this state for their own selfish ends, using the ignorant, unschooled black man. Eli, you can't approve of what's happening in this state?"

"Judge." He was hoarse with his weariness. "I'm a preacher. I don't mix in these matters."

"You know there's corruption. You know of Scott and Moses."

“Judge, all I know is they ain’t perfect men.”

“Corrupt men, put in power by the black man’s vote. You know that Ira Lilly grabbed this Land Commission, stole its monies, is growing rich from it. Can you be for Lilly, a man who bought and sold?”

“Judge, I put no trust in Mr. Lilly.”

“But so far as I’ve heard, you don’t speak out against him. A man like Dan Martin has no business as a leader. He’s bitter, he’s dangerous, he hates white people. You haven’t said a word against this black militia, yet you must know, Eli, that we can’t tolerate it, we cannot let it go on making our lives insecure.”

Eli sat silent, staring at the table.

“Have you no opinions? Do you take a stand on nothing?”

“The militia, sir, is Governor Scott’s doin’. How could I have a say-so on the state militia?”

“Eli——”

Eli braced himself for what he thought might now come. But when Temple spoke his tone was persuasive.

“We’ve got to break down the wicked barrier, Eli, that the North has erected between our two races, bring back the mutual trust we once had. I don’t mean to sound condemnatory of you. I realize you’re not to blame. Yes, I’ve heard how you’ve steered clear of the Union League. That’s commendable, a principled thing to do, the course of wisdom.”

“My reasons, Judge——” Eli was frowning.

“I haven’t failed to keep an eye on you. I know that you wield a real influence, you’ve got a big following in this county, you’re an eloquent preacher—I’ve heard this from white men who have gone to hear you. And I know that you’ve stuck to the gospel message, not used your pulpit to preach politics. You’ve won your place despite your affliction. It’s mighty praiseworthy, a credit to you. But now I’ve been wondering, haven’t you gone too far, stayed out of things a little too much, left the field clear for the extremists? You know that we’ve formed a new party in this state.”

Now, Eli told himself, now it’s come.

“The Union Reform is a coalition party—Republicans, who hate corruption; and Democrats, who want a middle course. Judge Carpenter, a Republican, is our candidate for Governor. Some

prominent colored men already support us. Delany is one. The North did wrong when it plunged your race unprepared into citizenship. But the Union Reform Party don't propose to turn the clock back. We believe in upholding the laws of the land. We won't take away your political rights. We've written this pledge right into our platform. However, Eli, I didn't send for you to ask you to come out for our party. I know that you want to keep out of politics."

"My callin', Judge," and Eli sighed.

"At the same time, you believe in peace. Hasn't the time come when you ought to step in, use the moral influence the Lord has given you? A minister has a duty on this plane." The Judge sat tapping his fingertips again. "Eli, you know that some trouble has started."

Temple waited, Eli said nothing.

"I mean these night raids by some kind of band. You've heard of them? Well, have you?"

"Yes, sir." Eli spoke very slowly. "There are some rumors goin' round."

"I think"—Temple also weighed his words—"that just some bad wild elements—black or white, nobody seems to know—are playing pranks, up to mischief-making. On the other hand, I might as well tell you, white men are growing desperate. I myself believe in the rule of law, I oppose violence, always will. But these terrible, wicked times, Eli—there might be those who felt it was their right to take affairs into their own hands. This brings me to the matter that I wanted to speak of."

Eli kept his eyes fixed on Temple's face.

"I'd like to see you write a letter to the county newspaper. You don't have to say that you will vote with us. Put the matter on a moral plane. Call for compromise, call for peace between the races. Lots of black men would welcome your move. Now they're scared not to go with the herd. You'd have a bigger following than you've ever had before. And white people all over the state would applaud you."

"Well?" Temple said, when they'd sat for several moments.

"Judge, I'd like to do what's right."

"Would I ask you to do something wrong, Eli?"

"Right, I mean, for my people, Judge."

“Eli.” He noticed Temple’s heavy frown, and the withdrawn look that overcast his face. “I’m a proud man. It’s not easy for a man, raised like I was, to seem . . . to beg a colored man. I’m doing what I can to head off violence. It may be too late. It’s my duty to try. I most solemnly urge you. Eli, you’re a praying man. Pray. Ask Almighty God to show you your duty.”

Eli knew by the time the wagon got him home, what step he would take, though he did not tell Sol. Nor did he tell Anna, when, out of the blue, she came, saying, “Eli, Dan says you came to talk to him.”

“I was tryin’ to do my duty, Anna.”

“Don’t you see, if whites turn us back on one right, they’ll try it on others? Can’t you see that, Eli?”

“Anna, we’ve somehow got to make peace with whites.”

“We’ll make peace with them when they stop mistreatin’ us.”

“Anna, won’t we ever reconcile this country?”

“Eli, I say, maybe not. Not till whites quit tramplin’ on the colored man. All our side asks is to have the right of livin’ on this earth like humans. They say, no, we’ll push you back, you can’t have the same rights we do. Eli, if we’re timid, let ourselves give ground, a little on this, then on that, what’s bound to happen? They’ll keep right on, take away every last thing we’ve got or can hope for.”

“You sound exactly like Dan Martin, Anna.”

“Maybe Dan does think that way. It don’t mean I copied him or anybody. I did my own thinkin’, Eli, you know that, long time ago when I was trudgin’ to my freedom, and goin’ through swamps and over mountains and gettin’ lost in dark woods, and I couldn’t be sure, expectin’ any time to hear hounds bay. That time gave me time to think my own thoughts, plenty of time. No, Eli, you know I do my own thinkin’.”

“And I’ve got to do mine, in the sight of the Lord.”

“Eli, you could still help out the Union League. Why don’t you do it?”

“Anna, I’ll have to do what seems right to me.”

No doubt Anna had told Emmy, and Emmy had told Sol what Eli had said. This much is certain, that when, on that third Friday in September 1870, one month before elections, Eli called Sol as he came in from the fields, called him to his door, and asked him, “Sol,

does the League meet tonight?" all Sol could do was stare and blink his eyes.

"I asked"—Eli was gruff—"is tonight meetin' night for the Union League? I'm goin' to it."

"You're—what's that you say?"

"I'm goin' to the meetin'. I know the mule's tired, but you've got to take me."

"Eli." Sol's voice took on an edge. "You can't get in, you know. You ain't a member."

"They'll let me in, I reckon, if I say I'm goin' to join."

"Are you plumb crazy, Eli? All these years you wouldn't go near it. All of a sudden——"

"Maybe it's not so sudden."

"All right, but you've told nobody. You've let people think——"

"I couldn't help it, Sol!"

"God A'mighty, Eli!"

"Quit profanin' God."

"Je——sus Christ!"

"I told you to hush. I've decided. There's no use talkin'."

When Sol drove up with Eli, the lamps had been lit, and a faint misty light streamed through the schoolhouse doorway. They could see several men—Dan Martin, Giles Turner, Tim Moore, Isaac Darrow—heads together, inside the building, and could make out men, though their forms were indistinct, waiting in the heavy shadows outside in the yard.

Sol stopped the wagon where the lamplight touched Eli. A sudden hush fell on the groups of waiting men. A few said softly, "Evenin', Preacher." One man darted quickly into the building; they could see him gesticulate as he spoke to Martin.

Martin, with the others, walked deliberately down the steps.

Eli spoke loudly.

"Who is the president?"

Martin, stepping forward, stared up at Eli.

"I'm here to join the League."

Martin said nothing, and the crowd remained quiet.

"Well, how do I join?" Eli said harshly. "If you've got to vote me in, I'll wait here while you do it."

"We'd like to know your reasons——" Martin began.

"That's the rule, Eli," Tim broke in. "We have to vote on it. However"—Eli heard Tim's soft familiar chuckle—"like as not we won't take long decidin'. Brothers, what about it? Do we let the Preacher in? Come on, Dan, let's go tend to this here business. You comin', Sol?"

Martin led the way inside, and the men trooped after him, a quiet sober lot, who seemed to make no haste. Eli saw the door close, and found himself alone, and felt the strangeness of it, waiting outside this place.

A man appeared from the shadow of the house.

"It's me, Eli," Luke Judson murmured. "I waited out here to tote you in."

"You belong, Luke?"—a queer note in Eli's voice.

"I joined," Luke's voice apologized, "two years ago. We ain't supposed to tell."

From a distant pond they could hear frogs croak, and from nearby woods an owl's soft hoot, still they waited.

Eli coughed.

"Got a cold?" Luke said.

"No," Eli said. "I'm all right."

The door swung open, Tim was standing in it, a smile of welcome on his face.

"Come on in, Eli. Tote him in, Luke."



"Eli," Sol said, as they were driving home. "Can't you tell me what on earth made you change?"

Squeak of wagon wheels grated on the quiet night.

"I reckon," Eli said, "it's been comin' on a long while, Sol. It may be sinful——"

"Sinful? Why?"

"It's turnin' from my callin', but I see no other way."

"You won't give up your preachin', you don't have to do that."

"No. And it ain't that I intend to mix in things much. But I've got to have a right to say what I think. I figured they'd listen if I'm one of them. We've got to find a compromise way, Sol. We've got to make peace, I don't know how."

It was one thing to prepare for Sabbath meeting, read in his Bible, ponder what it meant, and each week, as the hour drew nearer, feel surge through him the strange, wonderful, anticipatory sense of people responding, rapt faces, excitement rising, and when the time came, forgetting himself as he poured out his message. It was something very different to attend League meetings. Here he found himself a member, nothing more, and soon aware—he could scarcely fail to be—of how Dan Martin swayed all decisions, sometimes by argument, but even by command. Eli first learned this when he tried to line up the League against Martin's plan for the Union Reform (Democrats) rally. But Martin had won, and had taken his brass band, though the whites had been ready, and had driven them off before they could play a single tune. If anything, Eli felt, this had made Martin more morose, more determined, to "get back at whites." Only Tim Moore seemed to hold Martin in check, and as Eli felt, more often than not, Tim fell in with Martin.

True, new members were soon pouring in, due, the old members said many times, to the Preacher's joining. And at the outset there had been high enthusiasm for the change. Eli, for a little while, was warmed by praise from those who for so long had been estranged from him. It soon appeared that the new men who came looked, not to Martin, but turned toward Eli, when it came to a vote. Until it became an embarrassment to him to see them wait, turn frankly in their seats, and hold up their hands the way he did. One evening Martin openly accused him, did so in meeting, of bringing in the timid, the lukewarm men, so they would support his "compromising." A bitter wrangle followed, and only Tim Moore's steady insistence that Martin was wrong and ought to take it back had kept the new members in the League, they had been made so angry, their feelings so wounded. Eli stayed away for the next two meetings. But election day drew near, he felt he must go. After all, he had joined to influence things, and this was the time when his influence was needed.

Two weeks before elections—there was still time to act—Eli saw Temple for the first time since their talk. It was for but a moment. He was passing Temple's place, and the Judge, horseback, stopped the wagon. "I've been hoping for that letter in the paper," he said.

And Eli said, "Judge, I'm tryin' other ways." Temple frowned, and seemed about to speak, but he must have changed his mind, for he then moved on. At League meeting that week, Eli brought up his plan, the last chance he would have, since the county weekly would appear but one more time before election day.

Eli proposed, and he had the letter written, that Sand Hollow Union League write the county paper, asking for a peaceful election day, telling men to vote according to their consciences, and whatever the outcome, calling for goodwill between white and colored when elections were over.

Martin, presiding, was so taken aback, he stood staring at Eli, saying nothing. Nobody spoke for several tense moments, until old Simon Darrow rose to his feet and started the bitter fight when he said, "I'm dead against it."

Martin's tongue was loosed, he lashed Eli, men rose to their feet, crying, Martin had no right, until the room was in an uproar—shouts, accusations, name-calling, curses, between the two factions. Eli sat trembling in a helpless fury, while the hateful storm raged around him.

When it came to the vote, Eli lost. It was Giles Turner's duty to count off the hands, and Giles did it brusquely and with quick dispatch. Eli wanted hands recounted, but Martin cut him off. "You've been voted down. Now hush, let us get on with our business."

In the final ten days before elections, Eli and Martin had one last dispute, not at League meeting, but after preaching, when Eli and Sol and his family stayed to eat Sunday dinner at Darrow's house. Dan Martin and Janie were there. Also Tim Moore, who still hoped for Anna, although all these years she never had relented.

Foreboding lay over the gathering. For three nights past there had been Ku-Klux raids, none yet in Sand Hollow, but in other parts of Clay, raids, moreover, that took a special form, since no leading men had been involved. They had come on field hands, mostly merely threatening, though they had thrashed a few. In every case they had said the same thing, "This is a warning. Stay away from the polls."

"Reckon they'll keep it up every night till election day?" Emmy wondered.

"Likely," the others agreed, since the raids' intent had been made so plain.

"This wouldn't be happenin' if we'd done what I wanted." Eli spoke in quick sharp tones.

Tim's eyes narrowed, he glanced quickly at Martin, who, however, sat silent, his mouth set.

Eli, as he thought back on it afterward, still did not know what had driven him on.

"We'll never have peace if Dan's way is followed! If the Ku Klux comes on us, it'll be Dan's fault."

A shocked silence fell on the room.

"I didn't mean——" Eli began.

"There's one thing wrong with you!" Martin leaped to his feet, great voice roaring. "You're scared!—Ain't you got no manhood?" He waved his huge fist and rushed from the room.

Two days before elections, Martin's cabin was raided, around one o'clock on a dense foggy night. He heard the horsemen coming and slipped out his back window. The robed figures searched the attic, but did not harm Janie.

Throughout that last week Eli lifted not a hand, either for nor against—he sat back unheeding. Since Martin's taunt he had remained to himself, face overcast, eyes often brooding. On election day he hated to go, but if he must he wished to go early, before crowds came, and return home promptly, not do as others did, linger at the place. But Sol said he had to get some cotton picking done; they were crazy, he said, to hold voting in October. It was late afternoon when they reached old Dumont's house, Sand Hollow polling place in 1870.

Matt Dumont himself was Republican manager, an old-line Union man, a white man owning land. He was seated by the table that held the ballot box, young Tom Reese in a chair beside him. Reese was present for the Union Reform. Isaac Darrow and Roy Sommers were the other two watchers. They were in charge of the unused ballots.

When Sol carried Eli in, Roy Sommers called to Dumont.

"I thought voters didn't have no right in this room?"

"Oh, that's all right, Sommers," Tom Reese said. "We don't mind if Eli waits in here."

Matt Dumont peered at Eli from under bushy brows. Eli noticed that the old man's cheeks above his beard were flushed and mottled.

"That you, Eli?"—Dumont was near-sighted. "Where you been all day? I been needin' somebody to read things for me. You come and sit right here nearby my chair."

"Now, Matt," Tom Reese said. "I don't know if that's legal."

"I don't care." Dumont sounded flustered. "Can't read myself, you all been tryin' tricks. I need Eli. Bring him here, Sol."

Tom Reese shrugged, Roy Sommers scowled, but Dumont had pulled a chair close behind him.

Eli muttered, "No, Sol!" Sol, while hesitating, carried Eli to the chair.

The table with the box sat at the chimney door, with the door wide open and the voters ranged outside. A long line stood there, white and colored men. Helpers for each side came and got ballots for them. This was the scene that Eli sat and watched.

Several curious happenings had occurred that day, though Eli did not know of them till he was driving home, when Tim, who rode with them, told them the tales, some with a frown, some with relish. One dispute had been caused by unused ballots that Isaac had noticed, and had pointed out to Dumont. A few Republican ballots had had the name for county clerk scratched out, and a Democrat's (Union Reform) name inserted. Tom Reese had looked. "That's a bad joke," Tom Reese had said, and swept the ballots up and put them in his pocket. Isaac had protested, but Reese had said, "It bears investigatin'. I'll tend to it, Matt." And Dumont, who, by this time, was excited, had shouted, "Reese'll do it. Git back to votin'!"

The funniest thing that happened—Tim had laughed as he told it—was something Sue, Dumont's daughter, had done. Dumont's old wife, and Sue and her three children, had cracked the kitchen door and were peering in to watch; and then Sue had slipped in and stood behind her husband, big Simon Albright, who was loafing in the room. Nobody knew what had got into Sue—maybe she had got mad, or maybe just excited. Sommers had growled, "By God, what a votin' place—women and children invited!" First thing they knew, Sue had screamed, "Well, I'm a woman, and I'm goin' to vote!" and she had snatched up an eagle ballot off the table. Dumont had yelled, "Daughter, don't you dast!" But Sue had already slipped in the ticket. She had stood there, arms akimbo, red as a beet. Old Matt was mourning, "The law'll get me sure," while everybody was

shouting and yelling. But big Simon Albright, Sue's husband, had jumped to his feet. "Shut up, everybody! I ain't voted yet, I'm votin' Republican, I claim that vote! Anybody round here wantin' to dispute me?" Tom Reese had laughed, others had joined in, though old Matt had sat there muttering in his beard, "Lord God A'mighty." Later, Tom Reese had suddenly leaned over and snatched a ballot from a white man's hand—the man was about to put it in the box. "Here's skullduggery!" Reese had spread out the ballot, turning it over so all could see. On the outside it was Union Reform, it had the wide black band that marked their ballot (put there to mourn Robert E. Lee's passing); but inside, a Republican ballot had been pasted: there it was, with the big eagle on it. An uproar had followed, and a few fistfights, till Dan had marched some militiamen in. A whole stack of these pasted ballots had been found. And after that things had grown somewhat tense.

All Eli knew, as he sat behind Dumont, was that men's nerves were frayed, and Dumont himself jumpy. He gazed through the chimney door, and saw Tim outside, leaning up against a tree, Dan Martin with him, also several other men who belonged to the militia. It was then the line itself caught Eli's attention. Three white men were in it, whose turn would soon come, Squire Harry Colton, behind him Rob Abel, and just behind Abel, Judge John Temple. The faces of all three looked tight and grim.

Squire Colton voted and stepped to one side. Rob Abel stepped up, ballot in hand. A man named Dixon Williams, a northern colored man who had been probate judge since the last elections, poke harshly from a corner of the room.

"Dumont, that man is not qualified."

"You lie!" Tom Reese jumped to his feet.

"His name is on that 'disqualified' list," Williams said angrily. "Mr. Dumont, look at the list you were furnished."

"What list, what list?" Old Matt's hands fluttered.

"You stay back there!" young Reese said to Williams, who had taken a few steps toward the table.

"Find that list, Eli," Dumont muttered. "Look at these papers, find me that list."

Eli's hands fumbled as he searched out the paper.

"Read it, I can't read," Dumont kept saying.

"I found it," Eli whispered. "Yes, his name is on this 'disqualified' list."

"Show it to Tom Reese," Dumont said.

Eli pushed the paper across to Reese, who, eyeing it, looked at Rob Abel.

"It's here, I reckon, Major."

"I protest——" Squire Colton began.

"I won't stand for it!" Abel's voice could be plainly heard by all. "A black I once owned havin' the right—!"

Temple touched Abel's sleeve and Abel, livid-faced, stepped from the line. Temple dropped in his ballot. As he did so, his eye caught Eli's and their eyes held a moment, till Temple turned away, his look frigid.

White men in the voting line had watched Abel leave. One man dropped out, then another, and still another till not a white was left in the line—all were hurrying after Abel and Temple. Eli could see them forming a clump, while still other whites crowded round them. They were speaking angrily and gesturing toward the box. And he also saw the number of militiamen around Dan Martin had suddenly grown, colored men also having dropped out of the line, till the voting line had melted, only three or four were left. On the white side, Temple could be seen talking, and Eli could see others trying to break in. Rob Abel was not speaking, but his face was still livid. In the room where Eli sat, nobody moved; eyes intent, men were gazing through the doorway. As if the white crowd around Rob Abel had come to some decision, they fell silent, and, as one man, turned to stare toward the colored. Martin's men were in a tight knot, faced toward the whites, Martin himself standing in front, his face impassive, watching the white men. The two sides stood thus for several moments. Then Temple was seen to take Abel's arm, Colton fell in, and the three, with deliberate steps, walked away. A few white men returned to the voting line, then others. And soon colored men came strolling back, and the voting went on as before.

Eli took his kerchief out and mopped at his hands; they were clammy, and trembled a little.

When the voting ended, Dumont still kept Eli.

"You've got to stay," he said, "while the ballot box is sealed."

Tom Reese was there, and Dumont himself, and Caroline, Dumont's old wife.

"It don't require readin'," Eli muttered to Dumont.

"You can't tell, it might," Dumont said.

Tom Reese took in charge sealing the box, pasting a strip of paper over lock and slit. He dropped hot wax on both places.

"Well, we won, Matt," he said, while he pasted. "I was keepin' count. This time we got at least thirty votes majority."

"Oughtn't we to write something on the box?" Dumont said. "Eli——"

"No," Reese said. "It's sealed, that's all that matters."

The following week Dumont appeared on Sol's farm.

"I got to see Eli," he told Emmy.

"Eli," he said. "We're in bad trouble. The other side is claimin' we stuffed the ballot box because we won."

"How could you stuff it?" Eli said. "I saw it sealed myself."

"When they came to look at it," Dumont said, "the seals had slipped off. I spec' they got wet when I took the box to Clayville, though my shawl was wrapped around it. Don't know how the rain got in. Eli, you'll have to help me swear to how it was."

"I don't understand," Eli was frowning.

"I've got to make a affidavit, tellin' everything I did. You were there. You'll have to sign it too."

"I don't want to mix in it," Eli said.

"You were there, they knew it," Matt Dumont said. "Democrats are threatenin' to fight us in court."

2

On New Year's night, 1871, a loud knocking sounded on Eli's door. The suddenness of it, and the message brought by a man he hardly knew, named Levi Goss, a message from June who chanced to be in town, Goss said, confused Eli's senses, made him almost numb. Not until he was seated bundled up on the wagon seat, Goss crowded between himself and Sol, did Eli's brain begin to clear. And even then, as the wagon rolled on, his mind would wander, as a man's mind will when trying to avoid the full import of things. He muttered to Sol, "Make the mule hasten," and Sol muttered back, "He can do no better, Eli." In the haze before dawn he could make out the store, and the whites' Baptist Church, as the wagon rattled past.

Maybe they'd been drinking, maybe that was the trouble, he told himself, as the wagon clattered on. People celebrating New Years, it could be that. Though Dan never drank, said he had seen too much of it: since he was a boy, Squire Arnold sitting on his porch, whiskey bottle beside his rocking chair. And young Doc Reuben just like his pa. Which was why he hated Doc Reuben to tend him, though he always made the fever go quicker—Doc Campbell so old. But the smell of whiskey breath when Doc Reuben bent over, and the way he would smirk, "Pray for me, Preacher. I sure need it."

"Does the mule have to slow down?" he muttered to Sol.

"Road's mired here," Sol growled. "Walk all the way from town?" he asked Goss.

"Walked and ran," Goss grunted.

They were pulling past the Old Field, five miles yet to go.

"Had militia been drillin'?" Eli asked.

"They'd begun to guard the roads again just last week," Goss said. "And a few times drillin' out here on the Old Field."

"What else could you expect?" Sol muttered.

"Those whippings since elections were rumors," Eli said. "Nobody knew for sure."

"They'd been ridin' again," Goss said. "I've seen two men myself that they've come on."

It was full daylight, a little wind had risen, making the cold even more penetrating. They were passing Temple's gate, though the house could not be seen, hidden as it was behind a slight rise. Eli's eyes followed the winding driveway, marked by its two lines of ancient oaks. He had not seen Temple since election day, though Dumont had kept after him to see the Judge—Dumont was afraid he might be sent to jail. Then the Democrats had suddenly given up, conceding the election, nobody knew why. Eli shivered and pulled his shawl closer.

"Sol, can't you whip up the mule a little?"

Maybe he'd been wrong to stay away from Union League so much lately, but all the contention. . . . Maybe he had let the lull fool him; there had been so few alarms, only rumors of night-riding, in Clay at least, since election day. And Dan for awhile had even stopped militia drilling, saying, "They're too tired after pickin' cotton from dawn to dusk." Though Dan's real reason, he was sure, was the let-up of trouble, the lull. There had been this lull.

"Sol," Eli said. "I can't go home today. You'll have to go on back without me."

"I don't know when I can get back for you, Eli."

"I can't help it, I've got to stay."

They were coming to the first houses on the outskirts. The sky was overcast, so he could not guess the hour.

"Take the back way, Sol. Don't go through the village."

"It's quicker through the square," Sol said.

"Whites might be guardin' it," Levi Goss said.

"June's waitin' at the Elder's?" Eli asked.

"He said he'd wait there," Goss said.

However, it was not June who told Eli the story, but a man named Hawks, a blacksmith in the village. June had gone and fetched Hawks and had him waiting. It was Hawks, clerk of Martin's company, who had found Fuseth Ross unconscious and had taken him to shelter and had summoned the militia.

Martin had reached town a few hours before. He already had all the roads into town guarded. Abel had his Home Guard patrolling

village streets, he himself at their head; they were on horseback, and wearing pistols, though a few carried rifles. Martin's men were armed with their muskets, but so far Lilly had refused them ammunition. Martin was there now, trying to persuade Lilly. This was the news that Hawks gave Eli.

"Who started it?" Eli asked.

"Rob Abel started it," Hawks replied. "Fuse Ross did nothin'. He was walkin' down the street."

"Tell me what happened," Eli said.

"It was after dark. They passed each other. Abel stopped, said, 'Evenin', George.' Fuse just said, 'My name ain't George. It's Fuseth Ross.' Abel said, 'All right, Fuseth. Since I'm meetin' you carryin' your gun on the street, let me tell you, quit picketing our roads into town. It's goin' to land you in bad trouble.' Fuse said, 'Our side's got the same right as yours.' Abel's goin' round sayin' Fuse was drunk. He was sober as day, don't I know? Didn't I pick the boy up off the street?"

"Was Abel drunk?" Eli asked.

"Whites were celebrating New Year's at everybody's houses."

"You sure Fuse hadn't been celebratin'?"

"Listen, Preacher. Abel knocked Fuse down."

"What's Abel tellin'?" Eli asked.

"Course he's sayin' Fuse was about to pull his gun, though Abel knows we ain't been allowed no ammunition."

"Lige," Eli said to Hawks. "Bring Dan Martin here."

"I don't know if I can do that, Preacher. Dan's got the militia on his mind."

"Tell him to come as soon as he can."

"I'll tell him. I don't know when he'll get here."

Eli asked June, when Hawks had left, "You seen Judge Temple anywhere around town?"

"I heard he was here," June said. "Heard he rode in late last night."

Eli heard Baldwin's step on the porch.

"Elder," he called. Baldwin came in the parlor.

"June said you were comin'," he dropped in his rocker. "Chair feels good. On my feet all night."

"How are things now?" Eli was frowning.

"Can't tell. I been talkin' to the Judge."

"What's he say?" Eli spoke quickly.

"Says but one thing to do. Turn in militia guns. Militia won't do it while the whites are armed." Baldwin rubbed a hand across his eyes.

"Did you see Dan?" Eli asked.

"Yes, I saw him. He says they'll never turn in their guns."

"Has Lilly handed out any ammunition yet?"

"No." Baldwin spoke slowly. "Though Dan was still talkin' to him. It's a fact, of course, whites' guns are loaded."

"Elder!" Eli's voice rose, he tried to quiet it, it got out of hand. "It'll mean bloodshed! They'll kill each other! Whites know how to shoot! They'll come on us all!"

"You'd better hush, Eli," Baldwin spoke quietly. "No use our talkin' of the worst that can happen. We'd better put our minds to what we can do."

Eli waited that entire day, still Martin did not come, though he sent June out several times to look. The last time, dark had fallen. The street outside had grown oddly quiet, so that all Eli could hear was the Elder's wife washing up her supper dishes. She had brought him a lamp and he was trying to read. Suddenly he made out the sound of running feet, heard them at a distance, heard them draw nearer. The front door burst open, June ran in panting.

"Eli, Eli!"

The Elder's wife stood in the doorway, her eyes narrowed, watching June. She was a small woman, but standing there, lamplight on her, she looked tall.

"June," she said, and her face was stern. "Sit down and tell us."

"They're lined up!" June panted. "Both sides lined up, right on courthouse square. Whites one side. Militia the other. Dan ain't there. They've gone to find him."

"Is Peter there?" his wife asked.

"No, ma'am. They've gone to find him. Lined up, armed. Facin' each other. More comin' all the time. More whites. More on our side. People been comin' from the country all day. White men slip-pin' around our guards. Our guards lettin' our men through. Town fillin' up, been fillin' all day, that's what they told me."

"How"—Eli's voice sounded hoarse—"did they chance"—and he spoke slowly—"to get lined up? Who started it?"

"Nobody knows. Our side says they got the word that whites were movin' on courthouse square, goin' to make trouble. I asked Lige, that's what he said, the word began to spread soon after dark. They went there to see."

"Had the whites gathered?" Baldwin's wife asked.

"A few were there. Pretty soon more came. More of our side were comin' every minute. More o' theirs. That's all I know."

"And Dan not there?" Eli asked.

"They'd run to find him. He was outside o' town where militia is patrolin'."

"June," Eli said. "Take me to the square."

"You?" June said. "No, Eli!"

"Dan will get there soon," Baldwin's wife said. "Peter will get there. Eli, you don't need to go."

"I'm goin'," Eli said.

"How?" June said. "Elder's got his horse."

"You're goin' to tote me," Eli said.

"I'd be scared," June said. "Anyhow, it's too far."

"You can rest some," Eli said.

The square was dark, thrown into deeper shadow by the great shade trees that lined its four sides. A few dim street lamps cast a slight glow, but only a faint, small circle of light that reached no farther than a few feet away. And the square was quiet, hardly a sound, till it almost seemed as though not a living soul was near, until the ear became accustomed to the place and heard on one side stamp of restless horses, and on the other shuffle of feet.

June, Eli astride his back, pushed his panting way toward the front.

"Where's Lige Hawkins?" he kept muttering, while Eli whispered, "Has Dan Martin come? Is Elder here?"

Men moved slightly to let him through, though nobody answered as if unnoticed—abstracted men, eyes fixed, attention but one place, across the square.

As June, carrying Eli, reached the front line, they heard the sound of voices from the other side, not loud, but a sudden quick exchange, as though over there somebody new had appeared on the scene. Eli could sense that men near him stiffened. He could hear hands move and catch the gleam of muskets. Now, on the night air, he heard a

voice raised, and heard it come floating clear across the square, a familiar voice.

"You men over there. This is Judge Temple speaking. Is your captain there? I'm coming over."

He did come, walking alone, directly across the hundred yards of lawn, a shadowy figure, but they could make him out. And now Eli saw Martin advance, the Elder at his side.

"Take me, June," he commanded.

"Is that you, Dan?" Temple stood before them, leaving a few paces in between.

"It's me, yes, sir," Martin said.

"You're in command?" Temple said.

"I reckon, yes, sir."

"And you're there, Pete?" Temple said.

"I'm here, Judge," Baldwin said.

"Is that Eli Hill I'm seeing here too?" A queer note sounded in Temple's voice.

"Yes, sir," Eli said. "I just came."

"All right," Temple said. "I want to talk to you all. Neither side wants trouble here. Those gentlemen across yonder certainly do not. They heard you were headed here with your firearms."

Eli heard a sudden shuffling of feet.

"You all have got to make your people go home. No harm will come if you disperse at once. White people will forget this breach of the peace. I ask, insist, that you order everybody who has come crowding here to go home at once, go to their beds."

"Why just us, Judge?" Martin said.

"Those gentlemen will leave when you have left. I guarantee it."

"Why us first, Judge? It weren't us who did it."

"Dan," Temple spoke in low stern tones. "Do you want bad trouble here?"

"Fuse Ross might die," a voice called from the crowd.

"It don't help Ross to live for others to get hurt," Temple said. "Dan, I ask you once more——"

"Judge," Eli spoke. "Let me talk to my people."

"Keep out o' this!" Eli heard Dan's fierce whisper.

"Let me talk to them, Judge." Eli's voice rose a little.

"To ask them to go home?" Temple demanded.

"They want peace, Judge. Let me talk to them, please."

"Eli!" Martin muttered. "I will tell you again——"

"Eli." He heard Baldwin's whisper close against his ear. "You better not mix in this right now."

"Judge," Eli said. "Let me speak to you a minute," muttering, "Take me to him, June."

June advanced the dozen paces to where Temple stood.

Eli heard Martin's growl, "Don't you dast, Eli!"

"Judge," Eli murmured. "Couldn't your side leave too? Couldn't you tell us they'll leave the same time we do?"

"Eli," Temple said. "You don't know white men. Let me ask you this. Did you join the Union League?"

"Judge," Eli pleaded. "We ain't speakin' of that. Judge, they might start shootin' any minute."

"I demand an answer. How can I trust you if you've lined up with the Radicals? Do you think I've forgotten election day? And what are you doing here anyhow?—how do I know you aren't hand-in-glove with Dan Martin?"

"Judge, won't you help me get both sides to leave, give us a chance to pacify things?"

"Eli." It was Baldwin at his elbow. "I think you'd better let me talk to the Judge. Judge, if you'd hold off your side a little, we would like to talk things over on our side."

Temple hesitated.

"Very well, Pete. Let's say ten minutes. I think I can keep things in hand that long." With deliberate steps he walked over to the white side.

Once more the square was silent, except for the sound of a wind that had risen and was swaying and souging bare branches of trees.

Baldwin spoke to Martin in low urgent tones, Martin argued, Baldwin urged. Eli could hear them, though he heard only part, Baldwin saying, "They'd be mowed down, Dan. . . . Sometimes retreatin' is the only thing to do. . . . No, I don't know what he said. . . . Just pass the word, Dan, have the men slip away, leave whites standin' there."

And soon the word was passing, half whisper, half murmur, the sound of it mingling with the rising wind, as did another sound, a

swishing, rustling noise. The dark mass moved, it dwindled, it was gone.

Eli and June were left there alone.

"Take me back, June," Eli muttered.

As they circled the courthouse and headed toward the Elder's, a voice drifted to them above the rattling branches, "By God, they've gone!" Then they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs on cobblestones.

Tim Moore was with Martin when he came the next day, and as usual Giles Turner. It was late afternoon, Eli sat in Baldwin's parlor, and saw them through the window, as they circled the house. He overheard their voices when they entered the kitchen, Turner's came drifting to him down the little hallway.

"They had a man follow us part way here. He cut back through Simpson's alley."

"It don't matter," Baldwin said. "It's best you come to Eli, not have him go to you."

Thereafter for awhile they spoke indistinctly, at best he could catch a phrase or two. Presently he heard a quick step in the hall. Tim Moore appeared in the doorway.

"I just got here this mornin'?" Tim dropped into a chair.

Neither seemed to wish to speak. Eli watched Tim's face closely.

"Eli, the others would like to know what you said to Judge Temple when you spoke to him last night."

"I said nothin' amiss." Eli frowned heavily.

"I spec' they know that." Tim seemed to search for words. "I spec' all they want is to have us all stick together."

"And you think I said something against us to the Judge?"

"Eli, all you have to do is tell us what you said."

"All you all have to do is not line up against me. Not act as though I had no right to have a say."

"Yes, you've got a right, but say it to us first. You can see how it might make some feel uneasy if you went sayin' things to whites without lettin' us know first. Things are kind of bad, Eli, we've got to tread careful. Dan'd like to talk to you. And, Eli, if you and Dan would just try a little harder to get on—. I've said it to him too, don't think I haven't. I'll bring him in."

Martin leaned against the mantel, shutting off the fire's warmth. Turner stayed near the doorway, and Tim returned to his seat. Eli,

gazing through the windowpane, saw Baldwin leave the house and enter his store.

"Well." Eli's resentment sounded. "Say what you've got to say. Then I'd like to speak."

"I'm in command here," Martin said harshly. "I want you to quit mixin' in this business."

"You don't command me." Eli's voice was trembling though he summoned his whole will to steady it.

"Tim," Martin said, "is goin' to drive you to Sand Hollow. You've got no part in this. It's no place for you."

"It's my place, Dan, just as much as yours. I'll go back home when I think it's right to go."

"Couldn't we," Tim said, "talk things over, Dan? Eli might tell us what he thinks we ought to do."

"And have him go tell Temple everything we plan?" Turner cut in.

"Shut up, Giles," Martin said. "He can tell us if he wants to. And then start out for home."

"I told Eli," Tim said, "that we'd ought to stick together. I tell you all the same. let's talk matters over."

"We've got little time," Martin said. "It'll be dark in another hour. I left Isaac in charge, but I've got to get back there."

"I don't even know what's happenin'," Eli said.

"Nothin' much is," Tim said. "Dan's quit guardin' the roads, whites were gettin' in anyhow. All our side is gathered at the barbecue field. It keeps them outside town, maybe keeps them in hand."

"Where're the whites?" Eli said.

"Campin' around Abel's iron mill," Tim said. "He's still got his men patrollin' the town."

"How long will this go on?" Eli said bitterly.

"I reckon we don't know——" Tim began.

"I've got some news," Baldwin spoke from the doorway. Deliberately he came in and took a seat, waiting a moment before he continued. "About a hundred white men have got here from North Car'lina, rode in about two hours ago. Made straight for Abel's iron mill, have set up camp there. Armed with pistols. It's said Abel brought them, figurin' they can't be extradited in case of trouble. Now they've set out around the town. Hawks just came to tell me, said they're like a bunch o' cavalry, as no doubt they were.

Like as not they'll ride this way. Spec' you all better get back to our people, Dan. Cut across my gully, take the path through the woods."

"Giles," Martin said. "Run let Isaac know. Tell him, keep the barbecue field well guarded, let nobody leave, let none but our side through. Elder, we've got to decide what we'll do, decide mighty quick before night falls again."

"They're comin'," Tim said.

Baldwin jerked in the blinds, though he tilted the shutters, motioning to Martin. Martin watched through the blinds, Tim standing beside him. Through the shutters came rays from the sinking sun, narrow shafts of light, that danced and shimmered. Eli watched the patterns on the wall across from him.

To his ears now came a rhythmic sound, horses on the move in a steady measured walk. He could even hear the squeak of saddle leather, though this was all he heard as the horsemen slowly passed.

"So they think to scare us," Martin said gruffly.

"This can't go on," Baldwin said.

"I've been sayin' that," Eli said. "It's no use waitin' till the whites give way. They don't intend to."

"We're to turn tail and run?" Martin demanded angrily.

"One thing"—Baldwin sat frowning—"is to make our people go back home. There must be a thousand out yonder now, and every hour brings more, men bringin' wives and children. Why they pour in I don't exactly know, except they don't feel safe out in their cabins. This Ku-Klux ridin' startin' up again."

"If they don't go home it means battle, don't it?" Eli's voice held the sharp high note.

"No," Martin said.

"I don't know," Baldwin said.

"We stand our ground," Martin said, "they'll make peace."

"Maybe," Tim said. "I ain't sure."

"We've got our own government down in Columbia!" Eli burst out. "Ain't they good for nothin'? Can't Scott help?"

"Now, that's an idea." Baldwin eyed Eli. "Maybe the Governor might help quiet things."

Martin, brow lowering, eyed Eli suspiciously.

"He might," Tim said. "Oughtn't we to try?"

"Did Temple want that?" Martin said.

Eli glared at Martin.

"Now, Dan," Baldwin said. "Whites couldn't want it. Governor's on our side. Let's see. . . ."

Baldwin picked up a pen and began to write. He read them the telegram in a few moments.

"I'll go take it myself," he said. "And take Ben Strong. Ben used to be a telegraph agent, he can listen. I don't trust what that agent might tap off."

"It's for us to hold off a clash through the night," Tim said. "We'd better get back, Dan, go help Isaac."

Throughout that long night Eli heard the patrols, North Carolinians and Clay County whites, horsemen, moving up and down streets till dawn, and even after daylight, the steady beat sounding. A few men came and went next morning, seeking out Baldwin. Along toward noon the telegram was brought. Baldwin came hastening over from his store, Tim with him.

"General Andrews, Eli." Baldwin's brow seemed smoother than it had been throughout these days of strain. "Governor Scott is sending his head of state militia. And he's telegraphed Rob Abel that he won't stand for bloodshed."

"Eli," Tim said. "It was your idea!"

But Eli found no pleasure in Tim's words, since yesterday he had felt so cut off, so unsure.

General Andrews arrived on the afternoon train. Martin and his officers were at the train to meet him—this Eli learned when everything was over. But another delegation also met the General, including Judge John Temple and Major Rob Abel, and General Andrews drove off with the white men.

Thereafter the affair came to a quick conclusion. The General, on a borrowed horse, appeared before the colored crowd. Dusk was falling, the air extremely chill. It had rained that day and the field had grown muddy. The shivering, hungry throng was huddled close together, as though by this means they might keep themselves warmer. When the General arrived Martin walked beside him. Martin and his officers lined up the militia.

The General sat on his horse while he spoke and his voice carried well to the edges of the crowd.

The white side, he said, had agreed to disperse. He had given his word that the colored people would. Moreover, as commander of the state militia, he possessed authority to tell them what to do. The Clay militia company must turn in its guns.

Something like a sigh went through the throng, an expulsion of breath, and shoulders seemed to sag.

"General, sir." Dan Martin spoke so low no one else could hear. "What about the white side? Are they handin' over theirs?"

Looking down at Martin, Andrews also spoke softly.

"All they've got are sidearms. They've promised not to use them."

Thereupon the General issued his order. Turn in their muskets, put them under lock and key. He had handed the order to Colonel Ira Lilly. They were not to be reissued until he himself permitted. And the crowd gathered here would now disperse and go home.

"See to it, Captain," he spoke sternly to Martin.

Around eight o'clock that evening the North Carolinians took their leave, though not before they had taken a last jog around the town. One young chap was playing his guitar and singing as they rode. Eli heard them approach, heard them pass Baldwin's house, from where he sat in darkness, all the lights being doused. And he made out the song, a familiar camp ditty that he had heard sung in wartime by departing southern soldiers. The company moved along at a slow, easy trot, down the long straggling street that marked the colored section. From one of them sounded a long piercing yell. Rollicking laughter followed in its wake. From another came a shrill hilarious shout, the words sounding high and clear on the night—"Yip-pee! Here's your Ku-Klux!" Another, and another took it up, outbursts of laughter mingling with the yells. Even when the hoofbeats had died away, and the colored settlement was once more wrapped in darkness, no gleam of light showing save from the stars, there came drifting back to Eli's ears that faint ribald shout, "Yip-pee . . . Ku-Klux!", and the distant merry laughter, floating up.

By the end of that first week in January, militia guns were under lock and key. Eli had hoped that Sol would come for him on Saturday, since he had wished to reach home for Sunday preaching. Heavy rains fell, this could not but cause delay, so that Eli had

settled himself to wait. He was staying at Baldwin's as he always did on those rare occasions when he remained in town.

Sunday in Clayville was a quiet day. Rain had ceased late Saturday night, and while streets were mired a cloudless sky brought people out so that churches were crowded, and village streets, after church time, saw throngs afoot and in carriages, making their way. In the colored section the Elder's church was thronged—the new Methodist church that had been built within the year following emancipation. Eli attended, and at the Elder's urging sat on the rostrum and gave the long prayer. After preaching crowds lingered, and as was the Sabbath custom, gathered in clumps to talk awhile. True, on this Sunday, they were sober people—events of the week had not been forgotten.

Monday passed, likewise a quiet day, with both white and colored at their usual occupations. Monday night, however, which again was overclouded, saw some curious happenings that were never quite explained. Some said that Ira Lilly got drunk and fired the shots, stood at an upstairs window of his hotel. Some said that he was sober and fired as a signal—this was the whites' version that began to circulate. Fires certainly broke out, the alarm did ring. Eli heard the alarm, first, the Baptist Church bell, then other church bells chiming in, and soon heard the thud of galloping horses, the whites' Home Guard on the move. At Baldwin's house they gathered quickly on the porch, and could see one house going up in flames, an old vacant house about a half-mile distant that sat on a rise off to itself. Later that night they heard of other fires, though how many and where nobody could be sure. Three were identified, but some said there were six. Later, it became a "ring of fires circling the town, the town itself to be put to the torch—it was saved by the man who rang the alarm." However, Eli did not hear this tale until everything was over.

Tuesday a rash of rumors circulated, the main one, that Union soldiers were on the way, sent for, it was claimed, by Senator Ira Lilly, who feared clashes following the fires.

Wednesday afternoon soldiers still had not appeared, though they had been expected on the uptrain that day. But oddly enough the train had not run, for the reason that rails a mile or two out of town had

been torn up the night before. The engine had come puffing back that morning, engineer and conductor saying they could do nothing till the rails were laid again, the spikes driven in. Ira Lilly himself had gone to the owners—this story was reliable, Baldwin got it from Lilly. By this time tension was rising, and Baldwin was trying to sift out truth from hearsay in the spate of tales that went rushing through town. The president of the branch line, old General Reese, had made Lilly angry just because he was polite. “Senator,” he had said, “I’m mighty sorry. We’re gettin’ it mended just as fast as we can. It’ll be in runnin’ order by tomorrow mornin’, or the afternoon at the latest. I don’t know why bad boys had to play this prank on me.” Lilly was fuming, Baldwin said. He had had a telegram that a captain with a squad was waiting at Chester, sent to investigate. Willie Riggs had told Baldwin that Lilly had tried to leave town Tuesday night, but Riggs had stopped him, saying, wait for the soldiers. Now that the soldiers were delayed, Riggs had said, Lilly was a mighty scared man.

Wednesday night a mist lay over the town, not rain, not a drizzle, but a cold misting wet, that, sifting down, chilled man and beast and muffled footsteps and even horses’ hoofs. It was prayer meeting night at the Elder’s church. Eli had attended, but the bad night had chilled him; for some time after his return he sat by the kitchen fire in Baldwin’s house, shivering and miserable. Baldwin was out. After bringing Eli home he had gone to the store to talk to some men. Eli had sensed gloom everywhere, a tense anxiety, that could not be hid, though none had spoken of it in his presence. Perhaps they were speaking of it now at the store. When Baldwin still did not return, he at last went to bed, although not to sleep, not for an hour or two, not until he had heard Baldwin’s step, and presently knew that the household slept.

He himself lay in a deep sleep, when from a great distance, the way it can happen when an outside sound, persistent and sharp, penetrates at last the sleeper’s rest, he found himself suddenly awake, and pulling on his clothes before he knew what he did. The sound he had heard was a tap-tap-tap at Baldwin’s front door, and a voice, low and insistent, calling Baldwin. He was still wrestling with his clothes when the door opened and Baldwin called his name.

“I’m awake,” he muttered. “Got my clothes on.”

"That's right, son," Baldwin spoke softly. He was over by the bed feeling Eli out, and hoisting him astride his back. "We got to get out. Ku-Klux are comin'."

Of course Eli knew what went on thereafter, he was there. Even though it came as if from a distance, he could hear the low murmuring voices, feel the haste, hear the back door creak open, feel in the dark how feet slipped along, hear a foot stumble, and hear Baldwin's "Sh—h!" Hear him mutter, "Mr. Riggs, help my wife," and hear the reply, "I got hold of her arm." (So it was Willie Riggs who had brought the word—wonder how he knew?) And hear Baldwin whisper, "Here's the path to the gully. Watch, don't slip. Sides are muddy." And feel Baldwin under him, slipping and sliding, down one side, feel him stumbling up the other, and hear the others' feet sliding, slipping, pulling. Hearing Baldwin mutter, "Don't bump into the trees. Watch out for roots, honey"—to his wife—"try not to trip." And now the sound from across the gully and far down the street, unmistakable sound. Hoofbeats drawing nearer, horsemen on the trot. Baldwin saying, "Deeper into the woods, let's go a little deeper." And Baldwin letting him slip from his back to the ground, "Keep that quilt wrapped around you close, Eli." Wet soggy ground. He began to shiver and his teeth to chatter, he could not make them quit. All sounds in the dark woods ceased.

Now from across the gully where the house stood a loud clatter and shouts arose. Doors were banged on, yells could be heard, "Open up, open up!" Once a shot rang out. Crash and splinter. "There goes a door," Baldwin muttered. "Uh-huh," from Willie Riggs. Baldwin's wife made no sound. Noises from over yonder now became muted. "Lookin' for you inside," Riggs murmured. Waiting, listening, ears attuned, for the sound of cautious feet moving on the gully path. A whistle blew, a shrill, eerie thing, muted and muffled by the foggy mist. Another shout or two, what sounded like curses, clatter of hoofs more and more distant, and the night was still.

Baldwin said presently, "We'd better wait awhile."

His voice seemed to float in the foggy darkness.

"Yes, I reckon," Riggs said.

Voices sounded muffled when they spoke, they did to Eli, muffled and remote.

"Apt as not to have left a few hidin' behind," Baldwin murmured.

"Like as not," Riggs said.

"You all right, honey?" Baldwin whispered to his wife. "Not too cold?"

"I'm all right," she whispered.

"Quilt keepin' you warm, Eli?" Baldwin leaned close to him.

"I'm all right," Eli muttered.

"I reckon we can talk," Baldwin said, "if we talk real low. Mr. Riggs, how'd you happen to find out they were comin'?"

"They raided Ira Lilly's place tonight."

"Find him?"

"Don't know. Though I spec' he'd got away. They sounded mighty mad, last I heard."

"Didn't bother you?"

"You know where I live, up above my saloon." Eli could barely hear, though he strained his ears. "I heard 'em on the street, looked out my window. A great big band, must have been fifty, though they'd left their horses somewheres, come up real quiet, surrounded the hotel. I picked up my rifle, I'd been keepin' it loaded, and slipped down the stairs to the door between my saloon and the hotel. Then the racket began."

"They were in the hotel?"

"Tearin' it to pieces, I could hear 'em. And yellin' to Lilly to come out, or they'd shoot. Then some of them came to my door."

"Try to break it in?"

"Figured to, I reckon. Yelled to know if I was hidin' Ira Lilly. I told 'em, no. Yelled they were comin' in. I said, all right, I had my gun ready. They whispered a little, then they left. All this time the big racket kept up in the hotel. I slipped out a side window where I knew some vines would hide me."

"How'd you hear about us?"

"Chanced to spy a bunch of them talkin' together. Noticed two or three had special marks on their robes, figured they were leaders. I slipped along beside the house, got real close. Heard one say, 'Send Rattlesnake Klan to that nigger Elder's house. We got enough without 'em to take care of Lilly.'"

"That all you heard?" Baldwin said.

"Heard something about 'that crippled nigger,' though what they said was kind of muffled. Anyhow, I lit out."

"How did you slip through?" Baldwin's wife whispered.

"Just crept around, ma'am, come by back alleys."

"Let's all listen a minute," Baldwin said.

For awhile the only sound Eli heard was the steady drip from the mist-drenched trees.

"Reckon we better wait a little longer," Baldwin said. "Are you mighty cold, Eli?"

"I'm all right," Eli muttered. "Mr. Riggs"—in a hoarse whisper—"did they say nothin' else about me?"

"I heard nothin' else," Riggs said softly. "Had another funny thing happen though. A young good-for-nothin', claimin' he's a Ku-Klux, sneaked in to see me, came by night."

"Somebody you know?" Baldwin asked.

"I know the man," Riggs said.

"Why'd he come?" Baldwin said.

"Said he'd tell on them if I'd help him get away. Wants to go to Canada. Said he'd had enough."

"Tell you anything?" Baldwin said.

"Few things," Riggs said. "I've promised him nothin'. Keepin' him danglin'. Don't trust the chap."

"Tell any Ku-Klux names?" Baldwin asked.

"I named a few names, asked him were they Ku-Klux. He's kind o' flirtin', won't admit, won't deny. He's comin' again. Told me one thing, said it roused white men's suspicions when Eli came to town at the time of the clash."

"That's too bad," Baldwin murmured.

"Uh-huh," Riggs said.

It was not dawn, neither was it night, when at last Baldwin said, "I reckon we can go." Eli felt hands grope for him. "I'll stoop real low. The ground's kind of slippery," Baldwin said. As he swung Eli up and astride his back, a rooster crowed somewhere across the dark gully. "Be daylight soon, You sho' are shiverin', Eli. We'll have to get some good hot coffee in you."

For some time Tim and Eli drove in silence. They had skirted the town to avoid its streets. Now their road wound far ahead, a heavy

sand track cut deep by winter ruts. Tim clucked often to the Elder's big bay to keep him pulling at a steady pace. Eli sat, chin muffled in his shawl, hat pulled low.

"This light buggy might make it in four hours," Tim said.

"Roads are mired." Eli sounded hoarse.

Tim cast an eye up at the sun.

"We'll make it easy before dark," he said.

Once where the road was deeply mired, Tim got out and walked beside the wheel, slapping the reins from where he walked.

"Can't hardly pick up my feet in this mud." He climbed in again. "Many mud holes like that one?"

"Maybe five or six," Eli said.

"We'll make it easy. That one was easy."

"How you goin' to get the Elder's buggy back?" Eli said.

"Drive it back tomorrow. I can get a ride out to the sawmill. Elder said you aimed to get back to Sand Hollow."

"Yes," Eli said. "Did he send for you?"

"I chanced to be in town," Tim said. "Came in yesterday when I heard of the raid."

"I couldn't stay there!" Eli's voice had risen.

"Sh—h!" Tim glanced toward the ditch where men were working. Presently he said, "I hear Lilly got away."

Eli said nothing. Tim clucked to the horses.

The afternoon wore on, masses of cloud began to gather and spread, till no blue was left, while the lowering sky gave an aspect of gloom to the bleak winter countryside. When they came to the long stretch through the pine woods, it looked as if night would be bound to fall soon, so that Tim, who kept glancing from side to side, peered through the trees, frowning as he did so. Once they heard the sound of hunters at a distance; at least they heard a gun, and heard dogs bay. Tim flicked the horse and brought him to a trot, though the big bay now took a great deal of urging. Tim kept him trotting till the forest lay behind. Eli said they still had four miles to go.

"We'll make it easy," Tim said. "Ain't as late as it looks."

Eli broke a long silence.

"Tim, I'd like to leave this place."

Tim touched the horse's flank with the whip.

"I mean I can't bear the thought of livin' here. I'd like to go away somewhere for good."

"I can't blame you, Eli," Tim said. For the moment he appeared to forget the horse.

"I've been thinkin' about it for a long time, Tim. I reckon I've really thought of it for years. Then it looked like things would be better here."

"It looked so," Tim said.

"Last autumn I wrote to Congressman Wallace. Asked how conditions were elsewhere in the country. Figured I might get a church somewhere else. But Wallace said they don't welcome our race, look on us with suspicion even up North. I've got the letter."

"I reckon, Eli."

"But, Tim, I've been readin' of another place. You know of Liberia, I reckon, don't you?"

"Not much, Eli. I don't know much."

"That not long ago some of our people went there? Boatloads of them went from Charleston harbor two years ago?" Eli's voice grew louder. "Did you know it, Tim?"

"Sh—h," Tim said. "No, I didn't know."

"It was in the Charleston *Union*. I tore out the pieces. The Colonization Society sent those people, helped them to go."

"It's a long way, Eli."

"Tim, they nearly laid their hands on me!"

"Hush, Eli, let's not talk so loud."

"That's what I mean." He lowered his voice. "Can't even raise our voices on the public road. How can I go on livin' in this place?"

"I reckon," Tim said, "every man has got to do whatever seems right to him."

After a while Eli spoke again.

"Tim, Dan's way is wrong. You know it's wrong."

"Eli, I sure wish you and Dan——"

"We've got to find a way to stop this violence!"

"It sure ought to stop," Tim said, "though I don't know how to make it."

"Dan's way ain't worked. We've got to try my way."

"Your way?" Tim turned toward Eli, whose shawl hid his face.

“Act Christian toward whites, try to pacify things. Tim, Union League holds elections next week.”

The buggy clattered over Rock Creek bridge.

“And some of the men been talkin’ to me. Want me to be League president, Tim.”

“Want you, Eli? You always said . . . I mean, your preachin’”

“It looks like it’s my duty to do it.”

“But, Eli, Dan——”

“They vote on it, don’t they?”

“Yes, why, sure.”

“And if they want me, I’ve got the right, ain’t I?”

“Why, sure, Eli. Though Dan was expectin’——”

“I don’t want bad feelin’ between me and Dan. But I’ve got to do what seems right to me. The men can choose will it be me or Dan.”

Sol had heard the buggy and was waiting in the yard.

3

Union League meeting had been a sorry thing, so several men had said to Eli afterward. The way Martin had behaved, as though he owned the League, and the tongue-lashing he had given Eli, and given those who wanted Eli in as head, saying they were timid, they would bring the Ku-Klux down on them all. Eli answered those who had come to him, and who still smarted, as he could see, from the sting of Martin's scorn, that it was true, he did want peace, he had not hid the fact of his intentions. What he had hid, though this he did not tell them, was how he himself, throughout that bitter meeting, had been obliged, so to speak, to encase himself within a tough armor of unyielding righteousness, lest Martin's sharp scorn break down his resolution, make him give up, make him leave the field to Dan and his side, give up the League and everything about it. Now he was president, now he could do the thing that he had set himself to do.

Thus it was that around three o'clock on a Thursday afternoon in early February, Judge John Temple, seated in his buggy, was driving toward his plantation gate. He had set out on a trip to Clayville, set out alone, although his serving man Rome customarily was to be seen with him. Also, moving on the long driveway, but headed toward the plantation house, a wagon could be seen making its toiling way, the mule a poor creature, and the wagon itself, so poor a thing, it was swaying almost drunkenly, the wagon body squeaking each time wheels turned. June Sims drove his wagon, and Eli was on the seat beside him.

Due to the noise that June's wagon made, they had not heard Temple's pair of horses coming. As a matter of fact, when they came to the bend and were slowly rounding it, Temple's buggy was stopped beside the road, and he was speaking to a colored man who stood looking up at him.

"That's Giles Turner, ain't it?" June said.

Something curious happened then, though not until a later time did Eli realize that he had noticed it. Giles Turner—if it was Giles—acting like a scared rabbit, suddenly plunged into a nearby laurel thicket and completely disappeared. June’s wagon was drawing closer. Eli could see Temple staring toward the laurel. But then Temple, hearing their approaching wagon, turned his head; Eli noticed that he was squinting his eyes as if he were trying to recognize their faces. In a few moments their wagon came abreast, and Eli told June, “Pull up the mule.”

“Good evenin’, Judge,” he said.

Temple nodded coldly.

“I’d be pleased if I could talk to you, Judge.”

“It’s late, Eli,” Temple said. “You can see that my horses are headed toward town.”

“Yes, sir, Judge. But it’s about the matter——”

“Well, say what you have to say, and say it quickly.”

“Judge, it might take longer than just a minute.”

“You don’t mean that you’re asking me to turn back to the house?”

“If you’d be willin’, Judge. You see, I’m here to try to compromise matters. Our side would like to ask for a meetin’, Judge.”

If only he might have dallied a little, let the matter rest awhile. Eli knew that such a time had passed, and even had he wanted to alter everything, he could not have stopped the downhill roll, with its swift momentum.

Thus by Saturday of that same week, Saturday, to catch the crowds of people who came to Birch’s store for supplies, there appeared on the door of the store a notice, calling all white and colored citizens of Sand Hollow district to assemble at the store on Saturday, February 17. In view of the unhappy state of things (went on the notice), disturbing the minds of all good citizens, they were called in Christian spirit to discuss how law and order could best be restored. Two men for each side signed the notice. Judge John Temple, Squire Harry Colton. June Sims, Eli Hill.

There it was, it could not be denied, it could not be ascribed to mean white gossip. The Preacher’s name was signed to it.

Late on Sunday afternoon, Dan Martin appeared at Eli’s door.

"You here, Eli?"

Dan did not take the proffered seat, but stood, back to fireplace, feet planted. Heavy face looked darkly shadowed in the winter gloom of the cabin's dim light.

"I reckon you're set on this course, Eli."

"Yes, Dan, I reckon I am."

"You won't listen to what others think—me, Giles Turner, Isaac Darrow, Tim Moore, your own brother?"

"I see you've been tryin' to get people set against me."

"They're against you without my tryin', except for your timid kind."

"No, Dan. You'll see I'm right, most men will come if you don't interfere. They want peace."

"Some are scared. That kind will come. I don't blame them, but you've had advantages—you've got book-learnin'. You've got no right to lead them the way their timid side calls for. You weren't elected League president for this."

"No, Dan——"

"Eli, you can still call off this meetin'."

Eli sat silent.

"I try to find excuses for you——"

"You mean because I'm crippled! I don't ask anybody's excuses, least of all yours, Dan!"

"What you're doin' will come on all our heads."

"Dan, won't you understand? I aim to do what's for our people's good. Can't we make peace with each other?"

"Whites'll get you at that meetin', and you'll come away stripped as naked as the day you were born."

"That's foolish talk, I don't know what you're meanin'."

"Maybe you don't. If you did, you'd never have done this to us."

"Stripped of what?"

"God A'mighty! Stripped of your manhood! It's all we've got to withstand them with."

"Withstand, withstand! Must we always be fightin'? Must we always be goin' against each other?"

"Eli, in the name of Almighty God!—It's no use, I reckon."

"Why am I bound to be wrong? And you all bound to be always right?"

"Eli, you're a dangerous man." Martin's smoldering eyes were fastened on him.

"So now I'm dangerous," Eli said bitterly. "First, I'm timid. Now I'm dangerous."

"Don't you know"—Martin's voice rose—"this'll bring them down on us harder than ever?—make our people more scared?—make whites more bold? They're after me! Talk's started, 'Dan Martin's makin' threats,' 'Big Dan says he'll kill from the cradle up.' Three, four white men already been to me, 'Dan, give up your guns.' 'We've just got them back, we've got the right,' I say. 'It's got whites roused,' they say. 'I'll go ask my men,' I tell them. Rob Abel himself stopped me, 'Dan, give up the guns. I'll loan you a wagon to haul them into town.' I told him, 'Only if the Governor orders me. That's what my men have decided.' Pity you didn't do some consultin' about this here meetin'?"

"Dan, I told you, told the meetin' when the men elected me, that I intended to try to pacify things."

"Three times a rich white man, Tom Simpson, has stopped me on the road, 'Dan, you ought to quit your threats.' 'I have made no threats. Whites have got nothin' to fear,' I told him. This very mornin' he stops me on the road. 'Dan, you better clear out, leave the county for a few weeks, I say it for your own good.' Tryin' to scare me! He had no right—I walked away."

"You'd do right, Dan, to call in the guns. It's a fact, they scare white people."

"Scare whites! Don't they scare our people? Cowards! Why don't they come fight us like men? Come out to the Old Field, we'd battle them! No, they go round at night, twenty, thirty men, dressed up in disguises, come on one poor man, whippin' till the blood flows, scarin' wife and children. White-livered cowards!"

"You don't have to holler at me, Dan. I know. I've heard them come. I've had to hide in dark woods from them."

Martin stared at Eli.

"Yes," he said slowly. "And so have I."

"Listen, Dan," Eli said. "We ought not to quarrel. Can't we make up? Won't you just this once let me try my way, and not try to keep the men from comin' to the meetin'? And then if I fail, let's talk things over, see if maybe there's some way that we neither one have

seen, but maybe it's there. Dan, Scripture says—I've been searchin' it out—*They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. Dan, God is not mocked.*"

"Mocked?" Dan said. "I'm no preacher, I don't know Scripture. But I don't see whites reapin' anything but advantage from their wickedness."

"Dan, *the roaring of the young lion, the voice of the fierce lion, and the teeth of the fierce lion are broken.* Oughtn't we to give the Lord a chance?"

"And you tell me, the teeth of the lion are goin' to be broken if we give in? No, I say, they'll be broken if we smash them in, and no other way."

"Dan, why do you have to be so bitter?"

"Why have you got to be so meek?"

"I ask you, Dan, give up your guns, let whites know that we want peace."

"I ask you, give up that meetin', let whites know that we are men."

"Where is the end, Dan? There must come peace. Who will start the peace? If we are armed, they will stay armed, they will go on with their raids, their whippings, their violence."

"So we'll have peace, Eli, if we turn in our guns?"

White and colored men met Saturday, February 17. One week later Emmy flung open Eli's door. Sol was at her heels and Eli heard him mutter, "Emmy, won't you wait, not come when you're so mad?"

"Look at this!" Emmy thrust a newspaper into Eli's hands. "Read it, read it! So that's why you told Union League last night they wouldn't meet any more!"

Eli had been trying to prepare for Sabbath meeting; his Bible lay open on his knee. He closed it slowly, eyes on Emmy's face, feeling a queer remote surprise that his senses seemed so dulled, he need not steel himself.

"Read it!" Emmy said.

Eli opened the paper, found the piece. While he read, no sound could be heard except crackle of paper, and crackle of a log that he had thrown on the fire just before they had appeared.

Sol, in dejection, had dropped on the bench, but Emmy had not taken a seat; she stood across the hearth, hands on hips, glaring at Eli. He raised heavy eyes to her face.

"Well," Emmy said. "Had you a right to do that?"

"Emmy," Eli spoke dully. "Things did not happen exactly like this says."

"How many were there?" Emmy demanded.

"About a hundred on our side."

"What was there? Any Union Leaguers?"

"Yes, though not many. No leading men except Luke and June Sims."

"June a League leader! June ain't been a member more than a month!"

"It's true, none of Dan's men came to the meetin'."

"Luke Jordan hated goin', you know he did. He only went because others were refusin'."

"That might be so. He refused at first."

"I heard him," Emmy said, "heard him say yes right after old Darrow got so mad, sayin' he was too old to begin holdin' meetings with white folks. You deserved his sayin' that. Luke felt sorry for you, that's why he went. Then who was there?"

"A lot I didn't know. I reckon field hands from some of the plantations. They don't come to my church, must be Baptists."

"Then how on earth, Eli! — What whites were there? Rob Abel, I reckon, and he a big Ku-Kluxer!"

"I don't know if he's a big Ku-Kluxer or not. He wasn't there, I don't know why. The Judge was there, he took down notes. Squire Colton was there, he conducted the meetin'."

"Who else, who else?"

"Most all of them, Emmy, all that matter any. And a lot of common men—Dewberry Hodges, Roy Sommers, men like that."

"More of whites than colored?"

"No, not quite as many. I didn't count, I just guessed."

"Did you make this resolution? These here your words?"

"No, I can't say I made it. I reckon it was mostly the Judge. Squire Colton put in some words. They had June and me sit up at the table while it was made."

"And you said all right, said you agreed?"

"It seemed all right then, though I felt bemused. It ain't seemed right since, I've worried about it."

"You'd better worry! Helpin' say this"—she snatched the paper—"lettin' whites claim they've got no knowledge of this Ku-Kluxin' business, when you know some of those very men. . . . You helped them lie, helped them mislead! And lettin' them put down this about the 'burnings,' as though our side had been doin' such deeds, helped them 'condemn,' and helped them to threaten that 'terrible' things would happen if the 'burnings' didn't stop! They put it to a vote?"

"Yes, they voted."

"Colored men too? Whites sure are smart."

"Emmy, whites did pledge. We got that much."

"Pledge what?" She shook the paper. "Pledge they'd come help when the Ku-Klux come on us?"

"They promised they'd come to our aid, Emmy. If any were molested, to run let them know. Every white man there held up his hand—I watched, I know."

"Some of them sure to be Ku-Klux themselves. It makes me laugh! And for such as that, you let your side promise—look at it—'hold no more secret political meetings.'"

"That is said wrong, Emmy. It wasn't just that way."

"It's printed in this paper."

"We voted other words, I can't remember what. All I know is, they weren't just like that."

"But you promised that the Union League would stop. Here it is"—rattling the paper—"they say it right here."

"No, I didn't promise. I distinctly told the whites I could make no such pledge."

"It's right here in the newspaper."

"Emmy, all I said was, I'd try. I'd use my influence."

"So you 'used your influence,' used it last night. Told the League it wouldn't meet any more."

"No, Emmy, the League voted on it. They felt it was too dangerous to hold meetings for the present."

"Voted! Wasn't Sol there? Voted because Dan Martin stayed away, and Tim, and Isaac, and old man Darrow, and even Luke—all good

men, so plain disgusted they wouldn't set foot inside its doors, knowin' what you had done to the League."

"Emmy." Eli's dull monotone had not altered, and did not alter now. "All I can say is, I was tryin' to do right, tryin' to put a stop to all this violence."

Emmy stood a moment longer glaring down at Eli, whose head was now bent as he stared into the fire. Suddenly she burst into tears. Sol leapt up, caught her to him.

"There, Emmy. Come on, let's go."

As Sol led her out Eli could hear her sobs. "How can I cook for him, doin' this to us? How can I wait on him ever again?"

The Union League had met no more. Three times Friday night had passed, Sand Hollow League had not met. By early March when night fell Sand Hollow men were leaving their cabins, making for the woods, this Eli knew, since even Sol now left his bed and slept elsewhere lest the Ku-Klux come. They were riding three and four nights a week, Black Creek one night, Sand Hollow another, though what they did showed no routine. They were being careful men.

Militia had not marched in recent days, not from any promise not to drill, but two weeks before guns had been called in once again by the Governor's order. Eli had learned this, though not from Sol, or from Tim, or from Emmy, from none of these, but from Jim, Sol's little boy, who had run to tell him. Lately Martin, for reasons of his own, had not called his men to march.

On the night of March 13, Eli was wakeful, tossing wearily throughout the early night. No doubt for this reason he had overslept. Daylight had come when Sol's voice reached him, low and urgent.

"Open quick, Eli. Something awful's happened."

He remembered but vaguely getting himself ready—the word that Sol had brought was tolling in his head, until he found himself on the wagon seat, mule at a lope, rolling vehicle bumping and rocking in its reckless haste (though why it should hasten nobody could have said), Emmy and Jim in back on the floor, clinging to the wagon's side, while Sol, grim and silent, flayed his mule, rawhide swishing as it tore through the air.



Dan Martin recently had been sleeping out, although at first he had fiercely refused. But Tim at last had persuaded him, until Dan lay out most of the time, with only occasional nights at home. The night of March 14 was one of these. Not even his own men knew Dan was at home, except Tim and the other company officers. Dan had spoken of it the night before as they sat conferring out in the woods—himself, Tim Moore, Isaac Darrow, Lige Hawks, yes, and Giles Turner. (“Queer,” Tim said when all was over, “there was no sign of Giles—he must’ve gone away.”) “I need a long sleep,” Dan had told his friends. “So don’t expect me here tomorrow night.”

One Ku-Klux band became confused, the night so dark it was small wonder, and turned up full two miles from Martin’s place, as it chanced, where Tim had his cabin in among a cluster of several that were there. Tim himself had lain down in his clothes, intending to stay a little while only. He was wakened by the sound of the horses coming. The disguised men were at a nearby house as Tim dropped out of his back window. “Open up,” he heard them yell. “Damn you, Dan Martin, open up here or we’ll shoot!” And he heard a woman’s voice yelling, “He don’t live here, this ain’t his place, it’s way down the road!” Tim ran to hide in the shadow of some bushes. Now a lone horseman galloped into the clearing—“God damn your hides, you’re at the wrong place. Follow me!” And they galloped away.

The bushes near Tim moved and swayed. “I’m here,” he called, and stepped from the shadow. Five or six men ran to him. “Try Pryor’s woods,” he told one man, “a lot of our men lie out there. Bring them all. We’ll pick up a few as we go, and wait at Dan’s in the blackjack woods. Whistle as you come, then we’ll know. Now run! For God’s sake, man, run!”

Dan’s wife Janie was wakened from sleep feeling Dan leap from her side. Only then did she hear the stamp and snort sounding like a hundred horses outside. Beyond that she could recall little: just Dan and she trying to get the blind open, and as they did the door falling in, and the room filling up, disguised figures lit by a torch, and Dan fighting and twisting in their grip. They hauled him out, she trying to follow, yelling and screaming, “Dan! Dan!” “Go back, Janie,” she heard him pant, “little ones. . . .” And the men hollering, “Go

back inside—you stay there—shut that door—goddamn your hide!” She heard an awful strangling noise, then no sound, except for the sound of lots of horses. The two little children felt her out where she sat on the bed—she was trembling, could not seem to stop—and they began to whimper, hearing her moans.

Sometime later Janie heard a noise, a kind of rustle and whisper at her window, “Janie, Janie. This is Tim.” She spoke to quiet the whimpering little children. Creeping outside she found Dan’s men (those from Pryor’s Woods just then ran up). All were gathered in the deep shadow of the blackjack woods.

How long gone? Janie didn’t know. How many men? Night too black, though plenty, plenty, a great big band. Which way had they gone—which way—quick? Up the road, up toward Rock Hill, of that Janie was sure.

Tim told Isaac Darrow, “Go back and pass the word—go look for more men anywhere they can be found—our guns taken, all we’ve got are men—if you find Giles, send him too—scour the woods—they’ll have to somehow find us. But hurry, man, hurry!”

To his men Tim said, “Run!” Maybe fifteen men, they set out running, starting by the road. Hoofmarks were plainly felt in the ruts, the freshness of them and the ground churned up. “Great big band,” somebody would mutter. “Hush!” would come a sharp murmur. Sometimes they took short cuts through the woods—a curve in the road—they cut out the bend. Or crossed a plowed field, cursing in undertones the furrows new-turned for planting time. Then back on the road, running hard, though stopping too every now and then to feel out the way, bend down, make sure of the hoofmarks still. Or stopping to jerk up a man who had stumbled and lay for a second sprawled in the mud.

It was so dark in those hours before day, night growing blacker it almost seemed. They would lose the traces, then find them again, and this kept up for an hour at least.

Once Tim let the men stop to ease their heaving chests. But he told them, “We’ve got to keep goin’. It’s Dan they’ve got. Get him away. At least find him. Can’t let him lay there maybe on the cold wet earth.”

At last the sky began to lighten, not that dawn was really here, but where before all had been pitch black, now was spread a dim

mistiness. Tracks showed as they had not before, so in spite of laboring breath the men moved faster.

Past Frederick's place they followed the tracks, and into an old log road through the woods. Darkness enclosed them, though not for long, for they were quickly out of the trees again and seeing in front a new plowed field with hoofmarks making their way across. Martin's men circled this field, keeping within the trees' deep shadows. On the far side the tracks took their course in among the trees of a piney woods. Tim and several other men, as if they suddenly found fresh breath, took the wide trail with great long strides.

Here was the spot where the horses had been tethered—muddy ground trampled by man and beast. Over beyond they now saw the opening taken by a big band of men afoot.

Dan's men hesitated. But hearing no sound, except for the birds singing to the day that was breaking everywhere, they slipped on through the piney woods.

Tim muttered, "Look sharp, now!"

Slipping along, they gazed at the ground, underneath underbrush, behind big rocks, every likely place that promised anything.

Most of the men were still looking down when Tim's cry came.

"O—h, Christ!"

Lifting their eyes they saw what he saw. Standing stock still in the little clearing, an open place among the pines, the kind of pines with spreading limbs, they saw the rope swung over a limb, and saw Dan swinging at its end.

The slowly rising sun spread a glow on the place. Now they could make out the sign pinned on him. Some could read and read to themselves those sprawling letters. But Tim, lest any man miss the words they had pinned on Dan, said, "See, this is what it says. 'DAN MARTIN ON HIS BIG MUSTER.'"

A man sobbed—really a boy, young Arnie Judson, horror-stricken, as his eyes clung to Dan. Tim turned and looked at the boy, and Arnie took quick hold of himself. So did all the other men, suddenly, as if somehow they were back in the Old Field hearing the captain's voice command.

Tim told them, "Listen. Somebody must go. We've got to bring the Sheriff here." He told the clerk, Lige Hawkins, "Run, Lige." And told

the men, "We've got to guard him, let no hand get near or touch his body where it hangs."

Lige Hawkins, as he ran, met their other men running, Isaac Darrow at their head, mud-spattered, heaving for breath. He pointed the way, and ran on himself. Soon thereafter he met men mule-back from distant places—rumor had sent them. Luke Judson was one; Lige took Luke's mule, Luke mounting behind another man. Lige was soon passing black people on the road, going to the fields, or to store or grain mill. Their anxious looks ("What happened on that raid?") made him stop long enough to tell them a little, though he had a long stretch to go, he could not dwell to comfort them.

Dan Martin's hung. They came on Dan. So went the whisper sweeping through the countryside. It reached the grain mill, and thence was handed on, though not in the way that gossip is passed, not when the words were *Dan Martin's hung*. And at the Sand Hollow crossroads store, while white men appeared silent and morose, black men and women, and little children too, coming early to buy went away empty-handed, hurried away, it almost seemed as if to shake common dust from their feet.

So it was that the word had reached Sol. A man had come running on the path through the pasture, well before most people had heard, just as Sol was hitching up his wagon to haul his plow to his far field.

Now Sol's wagon, no longer hurtling—three miles too far for a mule to lope—anyhow, people in the way—but pulling at a slow, dreary pace, came to the plowed field that Dan's men had come to. Long since those who had been drawn here had disregarded fresh-plowed rows, and had taken their heedless way across, till furrows had been trampled, and a track had been made. Those who still came followed this track, and this was the way Sol's wagon took, pulling hard, for the plowed soil was soft. Sol kept the mule pulling through the woods, opening wide enough, though rough to be sure, till they reached the place where the riders had stopped and tethered their beasts. Sol eyed the opening in the trees beyond, deciding, it appeared, that the wagon could make it, otherwise it meant toting Eli, so the wagon kept on through the patch of woods, the

pine woods where Dan's men had searched, eyes on the ground. It bumped over roots, the mule picked his way. Beyond could be seen between trunks of trees the throng that had gathered, so many people, so closely pressed together, gathered in the clearing that Dan's men had found, even little children and grizzled old people; babies' whimpers and wails drifted to the wagon as it drew close. Bright sun shed light and warmth, making dancing patches beneath the pines. It may be that Eli saw them, or at least his senses, in some remote way, were aware that sun sifted down on the place, for he had a strange kind of passing wonder that his body felt so cold under such warming sun.

Sol's wagon drew into the clearing, and dull-eyed people, seeing who it was, gave ground a little, making room. Dan's men had formed a rough circle, keeping the people well away from the tree and leaving a large clear space surrounding it. Tim, who had been standing near the place, Baldwin and Ben Strong at his side (Strong, the only white man there), had hastened forward when Sol's wagon came, no doubt thinking the Sheriff had arrived. Eli's eyes had been fixed on the mule, as yet he had not raised them. But when Tim stood beside the wagon, Eli looked down into Tim's eyes. Tim's face was blank. Eli turned his eyes away.

Moreover, he still did not find the power within himself to raise his head, so that his eyes that could have seen, seated high as he was on the wagon seat, would look on what was there. Moments passed, he flayed himself, even as Sol had flayed the mule—in his thoughts it was as though he heard the whip with which he lashed his shrinking will.

There came to his ears, distant still, sound of bumping wagon wheels. He saw Tim pass beside Sol's wagon, heard murmurs, "Sheriff's comin'." White men coming here to deny the deed white men had done. Eli raised his head.

And he saw the pine, the kind of pine with spreading limbs, and saw the rope swung over the limb, and saw Dan swinging at its end. Not up high, but high enough. His body swung, except when the wind that soughed through the pines swayed the limb, made it dip, so that Dan's toes almost touched the brown pine needles that the tree had spread beneath his feet. Now Eli's eyes made out the sign, he could read it plainly from his high wagon seat, the sign

that they had pinned on Dan. He traced the words sprawled across the sign.

The Sheriff stopped just within the circle, letting his glance take in the crowd. The two deputies, keeping close behind him, continually fingered their pistol holsters.

"I want no trouble," the Sheriff said, his voice louder than necessary. "See you keep your people back, you," and he stepped up to Martin hanging on the tree.

As if appearances would tell him something, the Sheriff eyed the body where it hung, took several moments for his examination, although he seemed reluctant to touch anything.

"Cut the man down." He motioned to the deputies.

With his knife the tallest deputy sawed at the rope. However, Baldwin and Tim Moore and Ben Strong and Isaac Darrow (several others started forward) quickly took their places under the tree, hands reaching up to ease Dan's body. As it sagged they let it down, and taking up the burden carried it away. There being nothing in the Sheriff's wagon to cover him, Strong spread his coat over Dan's face.

Eli heard the wagon start to roll, and heard its loud creaking as it bumped and swayed over roots and ruts. He heard its rattle die away, and still the people did not move.

He saw the Elder standing with Tim near the rope where Dan had hung, saw his gaze resting on the people, who still remained, rooted to the place. When the Elder spoke he scarcely raised his voice, so still was the clearing, so silent the throng, though his voice sounded strained as a tired man's might.

"Remember this. They pinned a sign on him that said, 'Dan Martin on His Big Muster.' Yes, they said better than they meant. We'll always be proud of Dan, he had a brave heart. Now he musters with other brave men who in other times died for their people. One more thing"—hesitating, as if summoning the will to speak. "These evil times will surely pass. I know they will, in time they'll go. . . . Now go home. It's best that you go."

Throughout that long day they sat in Sol's house, nobody working, even Emmy doing little, except for the necessary food they must eat. She prepared it for them as a sleepwalker might, moving sluggishly,

when she had to move. And they ate their food as people in a dream, speaking as it seemed only when they must, and then saying hardly anything of what had transpired. Tim Moore had made the drive home with them, and had remained, sunk down on the step, or wandering about Sol's barnyard, or up the rise a way, then back again. Once Emmy had said in low, dull tones, "You could go get a sleep on Jim's bed, Tim." But Tim had shaken his head and gone wandering again. Other men dropped in as the day wore on, not to talk, for they said little, but just to stay awhile and then go away.

Eli also remained at Sol's house, though at times everything in him cried out to be alone. He dared not leave—this he felt within himself—lest his going, the very act of cutting himself off, departing from their presence where he need not feel their looks, made them know how he could not bear to stay. Yet, he told himself time and again, they wanted him gone, they only suffered him, bearing his presence, and all the while thinking their own thoughts, "Dan might be here," as their glances flinched away. Tim had even said to him once, "It weren't your fault, Eli," as if the very saying it did not reveal their minds. He knew, he could tell, they all blamed him. As he blamed himself, though he was not sure even now what different he ought to have done, and he still couldn't say that Dan's way was right. There must be a right way, he didn't know what. Didn't Almighty God show a man what was right?

Then why need he stay? Over and over he asked himself. Why could he not bring himself to say, "Sol, take me over to my own house awhile"? Though once there, could he ask to return? Once night dropped, could he call to Sol? Now more than ever when night fell would they not be gone, gone to the woods, Tim, no doubt Jim and Emmy, even Sol? Now they knew it would not be safe, he would not dare hold them, had no right. Dan, with all his mighty strength, and still. . . .

Isaac Darrow appeared in the late afternoon.

"Pa and Anna takin' Janie to town to claim the body," Isaac said.

"Burial out here?" Tim asked dully.

Eli sat staring at the floor.

"No," Isaac said. "Buryin' in the Elder's churchyard, providin' Elder's willin'."

“He’ll be willin’,” Emmy said. “We’ll go to the burial,” she added presently.

“Yes,” Sol said. “Eli’ll want to go.”

All eyes in the room turned on him.

“Yes,” he said. “I must go.”

4

In the following days Eli waited in his house, a frail house with its one room, and four thin clapboard walls, and two doors, not over-strong doors, though Sol had fitted heavy bars to the doors. He supposed he sat waiting for night to fall, it was bound to come, and then lay waiting throughout the night, in fitful sleep, until dawn showed, this waiting that he had known, and that had seemed to have no end to it, since Dan was hanged and in his grave. Of course they had said, “Eli, you can lie out too,” though they did not urge, but assumed he was safe. A crippled man, one who had tried to pacify. Not until Colonel Ames had spoken did they begin to look troubled and press him a little.

Colonel Roger Ames, who, with his company of US Army troops, had arrived in Clayville four days after Martin was hung, sent, it was said, to investigate all the violence, but in particular, Martin’s killing. And he had begun to call in white and colored, probing and pressing—rumors were rife as to what Ames intended. Colonel Ames’s message had reached Eli within the week, so that he had returned to town to hear what Ames had to say. Ames had been blunt, though not unkind. Eli had liked the soldier’s eyes. Even so, he had found it hard to hold his mind to Ames’s questions: it had wandered, so that he was continually dragging it back to make himself listen. This was true until Ames had begun to speak of the young man that he had talked to, sent to him, he’d said, by Willie Riggs, the saloon keeper. “A member, so he claims, of the Ku Klux Klan,” Ames had said. So that Eli knew: it was the man of whom Willie Riggs had told them on the night they were raided. And the man had given Riggs, Ames had said, a true copy, he claimed it was, of the Ku-Klux ritual—this to attest to his knowledge of things. As yet he had furnished no names of Klan members. Then it was that Ames had said that this informer had asserted that white men, “I presume, Ku-Klux members, were saying that you, Reverend Hill”—Eli was hearing everything now, not a word that Ames spoke but had

remained in his head—"had 'egged on' Dan Martin, that you were now head of the Union League, and that you were a man to watch, now that Martin was gone." Eli could not remember whether he had answered. But Ames had gone on. If what these white men said was true, he "urged" Eli, "Don't take aggressive actions, white men were greatly aroused."

At this point Eli had spoken, though so great had been his turmoil, he had no notion of what he had said, how denied, what admitted, what words he had used when it came to Dan. Though ever since he had felt vague, unremitting discomfort, and had longed to go and say something further, try to explain, try to make Ames see that Dan had not been what whites were claiming. Ames had said, "But I can assure you, with our troops here, you have nothing to fear . . . quiet will shortly be restored. Your people can now feel safe and secure." And Eli had said, he could not hold it back, "And when your troops leave?" All Ames could say was, "They'll remain a while." Sol and Tim pressed him to know, and he had told them all he could remember. So that more than ever they had kept saying, "It don't seem safe, Eli, no matter what Ames says. Hadn't you better let us tote you to the woods?"

Thereafter Eli's waiting became a feverish thing, as he supposed (thus he cloaked his anxious watching), a perverse wish to have it come, have it over—as if such a thing could be over.

April passed, May drew near. April days, so full of bloom, so filled with smells of fresh-turned soil, so soft and mild, and in daytime so full of sun after showers, that earth and air and tree and bush seemed washed and clean. Despite their fears a lull had come. No sound of Ku Klux, nights were calm, no horses' hoofs, no disguised bands, not one raid in all of Clay since that night of March 14. Woods no longer housed its men, they slept soundly in their beds. And Eli slept, at least more sleep, though broken still. For somewhere deep within himself, that feverish waiting sense remained.

The watch he kept, hardly knowing what he did, came to an end on April 25. A man put his head in Eli's door, saying, "Preacher, you've got a letter here. I brought it from town."

The letter was addressed to "Reverend Eli Hill." A ship would sail from Charleston harbor to Liberia late October next. The American Colonization Society would be glad to welcome Reverend Hill on that ship.

Where before Eli had behaved almost drugged, eyes dulled, senses unresponding, mind, even speech, sluggish, as though only with an effort he could make himself talk, his whole demeanor now underwent a change. From this day forward he came alive.

Within the day when his letter came, he called Sol to him.

"I ought to have told you that I had written. But it was weeks ago right after I was raided. I expected nothin' from it." He spread out the letter before Sol's dazed eyes.

What happened thereafter happened quickly. Sol spoke at once to certain of the men, telling them that Eli planned to leave. And although he had read the newspaper pieces that Eli had kept, describing the country, he was vague in what he said, and being troubled also, he was reserved. There was some discussion among these men, but before they could come to talk to Eli, June Sims had heard.

Luke Judson had happened to pass the field where June was plowing, and assuming that June already knew, went to talk it over. He walked across the rows. June listened, and after Luke had left even, it seems, picked up his plow handles and straightened the plow tongue in the furrow. But then he dropped the plow, ran to the trace chains, unhooked them, led away the mule, hitching him quickly in the nearest shade, and began to run.

"Eli, Eli!" June was calling while still at a distance. "Eli, you here?" He had reached Eli's door. It was standing open, Eli inside writing. "Eli, I've heard!" June panted. "Is it so, are you goin' away, goin' to Liberia?" He could tell by Eli's face, the shining eyes, the look of hope. "Eli, can't we go? Can't Annie May and the children and me? Tell me of it, won't you tell me? Won't they take us on that ship?"

That night Eli pleaded with Sol, "Won't you all come? June wants to go. I'm writin' about June. Can't I write about you all? They pay your way, you can own land there. Sol, won't you just consider it?"

"I've got my place here," Sol said. "I'm used to it here. I don't know, Eli."

Now the fever rose in Eli. He wrote the letter. "June Sims, farmer, his wife and three children. . . ." And on his own account added the inquiry, "If my brother, farm owner, and wife and little boy decided to come, would there be room?" And that night he had no wish to sleep, nor even once did he set his ears to listen lest horsemen be on the road. He lay, eyes wide, seeing a ship. It was riding on the

water, water he had only seen pictures of, spread away as if nothing lay beyond. But then his eyes were seeing land ahead, and not any land that he was used to, although it looked green in his mind's eye, greener than any he had ever seen, pleasant and fertile. He was seeing himself putting feet on that shore—being carried, to be sure, though he forgot that—and hearing himself say, “I’m free. It’s my land, the place where my own father came from. Why wouldn’t I want to come back here?”

And Eli was now counting the days, the weeks, the months that lay between him and that time when he could go. He would note at each dawn that the lull was still unbroken, tell himself that the troops were still around, and that he was one day nearer his goal. So that while his eyes were bright, they held no sparkle, and while his voice was strong it was strained and tense.

In a matter of days Sol came after nightfall.

“Some men at the barn want to talk to you.” Sol’s tone was gruff. “It’s this Liberia. I’ll tote you out there.”

The night was soft and clear, no moon, only stars shining down. Even so, the men had chosen the deepest shadow cast by the barn, feeling they must take care, so that they were mere blurs to Eli’s eyes. And their speech was little more than rumbles and murmurs, as they put their questions. Eli had to strain his ears.

“Yes,” he murmured. “I’m told it’s good land. But understand, I don’t try to persuade.” “Yes, the soil is nice and rich, plenty of acres to be had for farmin’.”

“Could we buy land?” a voice whispered. “Have farms of our own?”

“Yes. Yes indeed. Though all I know is what they claim. They give a piece to every man who comes, twenty-five acres to married men, ten to the single. But of course crops are not the same kind we raise—that ought to be remembered. Some are like ours, sugarcane, a little cotton, rice grows wild, so I’ve read. But there are strange crops—coffee, and something like the yams we eat.”

“Schools? Nobody hinders?”

“I’m goin’ to teach a school,” Eli murmured. “Of course nobody would hinder. It’s our land.”

“They havin’ no trouble? No night riders?”

Eli laughed softly. “How could they? It’s our own people, they run the place.”

"Some of our race can be mean," a man muttered.

"Of course," Eli said. "Though I spec' we could stop them."

"You mean," a voice said, "no whites are there?"

"A few are there. But they can make no distinctions. . . . Don't you all see"—Eli forgot himself, till somebody whispered, "Sh—h!"—"It's Africa! It's our land, the place our race came from. . . . I don't really know more than what I've read. The life is hard, at first it would be, and some have come back. Maybe June and Annie Mae will soon be wishin' that they were back here." He smiled in the dark.

"Eli." It was Luke Judson's voice. "If some of us would go it would not seem so strange, we could help each other. Eli, could more go? Would they take just ordinary men?"

"We want to know," several men whispered.

"I can't be sure, I've written for June. Maybe there'd be room on the ship."

"I'd sure like to go," a low voice said, though the man then forgot himself. "I tell you, Preacher—"

"Keep your voice down, man." It was Tim who spoke.

"—is it right, Preacher, I should bring up my children standin' in fear of disguised men, sleepin' in the woods? No, I say. Preacher, I've got no money, I can't pay. How can I go?"

"When does the ship go?" somebody whispered.

"In late October," Eli murmured. "We go to Rock Hill, then on the railroad from there to Charleston where the ship will be waitin'."

"Cotton won't be in," a man muttered.

"We can't wait for that," somebody said.

"And," Eli finished, "those they accept, their way is paid."

"Paid?"

"You mean *paid*?"

"You've got to ask," Eli said. "Those they take must be good sober men, ready to work—"

"Oh, we'd work, we know how to work!"

"I've no wish"—Eli's murmuring voice trembled—"to try to over-persuade. But I tell myself, it's right to go. I know what any man wants, has a right to. There's no hope in this land. Can we educate and elevate our children? Can we live in peace? Are we treated like humans? I read in one of the papers how that ship that takes people

sailed into harbor on the African shore. And the people, seein' land,
broke out into singin'

Land ahead,

That's what they sang,

... its fruits are waving
O'er its fields of endless green
And the living waters laving
Shores where heavenly forms are seen.

I told myself, that's how I feel, how I'm goin' to feel."

Not a sound was heard except that the old bullfrog down at the spring began his deep, intermittent croaking.

"Write for me, Eli," Luke Judson whispered. "Write and ask if me and mine can go."

"Write for me," other men said.

In the next week they came like a procession, some to say, "Write," some to learn more. The list of names grew, until Eli got a book like the one he kept his school accounts in and began to enter the names in the book. Twice within a week he wrote a letter, sending in a long list of names. And Sunday at preaching, so high was excitement, people plainly paid no attention, but waited impatiently, and poured up afterward, asking questions, and giving in names. So that throughout still another week Eli was writing two or three times saying that still more Sand Hollow people wished to sail for Liberia.

By the third week thirty-two families wished to go, and still more were coming to question him. Eli did little but write more lists of names, men, their wives and children, occupations, why they should be taken, and pore over his lists, count, make mistakes, count them again, and then sit musing over what it all meant.

Sunday, May 19 came around. A quick shower had cleared the air, leaving a nice fresh coolness everywhere. When Eli was driven up to the schoolhouse, he saw that many were standing outside, unable even to press through the door.

"We'll meet in the grove," he called out, something they had often done in revival time.

The men set his rostrum beneath a tall pine, his pulpit on it, with his chair behind, and Sol carried him to his chair. Eli would have been a tall man, and he looked tall that day, upright in his chair. Seated as people were, on the ground, they had to tilt their heads to see the preacher. Eli sat watching them gather. Sunlight sifted through the trees, shafts of light touching the crowd. As Eli raised the tunes, read the Scripture, and at last began to preach, he could see in the uplifted faces how they waited.

"I'm goin' to tell you, listen to me, how the children of Israel went out of Egypt, went out from their bondage, the Lord led them to a Promised Land.

"And the Lord said, these were the words, the very words He said to them, I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters . . . am come down to deliver them . . .—Listen—to a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. Do you hear? ("Yes, Lord!" It was a woman's cry.) I'm tellin' of a promise, it happened long ago, far away in Africa. We came from Africa, our own people, it was our land, and the land of our race right now today, they live there by the teemin' millions.

"But some were brought to this land of slavery. . . .

"And so the Lord called Moses, led him up into a mount, sayin', Moses, go! Tell that old king, let my people go!" ("Glory!"—somebody let out a shout.)

"He led them right through the Red Sea, parted the waters, brought them safe on dry land. So now it began, they started on their journey, their long journey.

"You see, had you noticed? See where the Promise led? First on the sea, the wild stormy sea!

"But then dry land, and Moses led them on. Except they weren't to get there yet. They did wrong, some of them did, were led wrong by some of those who led. Sinned. Praise God, who saves us by the Blood of the Lamb!" ("Praise Jesus!")

"So they reached the Wilderness. They met such a time. Even after they went free, it came down on them. Maybe bein' tested, we don't know. . . .

"Do I have to tell you what they endured? The waterless places? The hungry times? The awful nights? Out in the Wilderness, night

comin' down. . . . Glory be to God! You know what happened? *He found them in a desert land, and in the waste howling Wilderness.* You hear me? They were FOUND! ("Hallelujah!" "Glory!") Found. And what did it mean, what could they now tell to themselves, to their children? What could they say as they met on the road and on the street of towns?

"*Give ear, O ye heavens . . . and hear, O earth.* No more lions, no more wild beasts to come on them, no more howlin' noises in the night, no more wicked oppressors enslavin', no more tryin' to make bricks without straw, no more lash. ("No, Lord!")

"No more disguised men ("No, Lord!"), no more whippings ("No, no!"), no more extractin' sinful promises, no more oppressin' a man at his toil! ("That's right, Lord!") No more cold nights sleepin' on the ground. . . . Roofs to cover. Quietness and peace. No more violence. No more hate. Lovin' kindness among all men.

"*As an eagle fluttereth over her young . . . beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead them.*

"Till in the Wilderness . . . waters break out . . . streams in the desert, this was the Promise. *A highway shall be there . . . it shall call itself the way of holiness.* And that is where they walked. *No lion . . . there, nor . . . ravenous beast . . . the redeemed . . . walk there.* They were now redeemed, they could now climb a hill and see the Land, see it stretchin' far away over yonder. *Blessed of the Lord be his land . . . for the dew . . . precious fruits brought forth by the sun . . . precious things of the lasting hills . . . the earth and the fullness thereof.*

"Listen! LISTEN! ("Glory hallelujah!") They came to that place! ("Glory! Glory!") The Lord kept all his promises! They came to a land that flows with milk and honey! ("Praise the Lord!") They tasted of its grapes that somebody brought, they drank of its water, cool water! ("Yes, Lord!") . . .

"And the Lord calls us! I know he does, to find that Promised Land ourselves! Somewhere, even though far away. He's tellin' us, Claim that Land! *Come to Zion with songs!*"

("Glo—ry!" "Hallelujah!")

The word reached Eli on Tuesday afternoon as he wrote another letter with Liberia names, now seventy-one families, all told—thirty-nine added in the two days since preaching. However, at the

moment, the letter lay forgotten. Eli sat immobile, eyes far away, senses rekindled by the lingering afterglow of that Sunday hour.

His ears may have heard the mule enter the yard, though if so he was unaware of it. He was brought to himself hearing Sol's quick step, and with it Isaac Darrow's lighter tread, and seeing the two men standing in his doorway.

"It's begun again," Isaac said. The lull had been broken. They had raided Matt Dumont.

Troops had not held them off. He would not get away.

As though the very earth had known a convulsion, Eli felt the room begin to swing and sway. He clamped his eyes shut, clung to his chair. Isaac's voice, like a thin reedy sound above the noise as of roaring winds, kept reaching him, telling him things. He tried to shut it out so he need not hear—need not know what they'd done to an old, old man, as they'd laid on the lash—not hear what they'd said, reviling him—not hear those hateful horror-filling things, white to white who'd gone against them. . . . Not see Dan, suddenly see him, hanging on that tree.

What happened then Eli himself could not have said, afterward he could not recollect, except that when his brain began to clear, he was saying certain words in his head, over and over. *He could not shut it out. He would not be debased.*

Sol was saying, "And the barn ain't safe."

Isaac was saying, "Better lay out. He's got to sleep in the woods now, Sol."

Abruptly, Eli opened his eyes, made himself ungrip his hands, made his hands lie limp on his lap. They sat across the hearth speaking in low tones.

"What is it you all are sayin' to each other? Say it to me."

"We're fixin' it for you to lay out at night," Sol said.

"Not tonight," Eli said.

"For a few nights anyhow," Sol said. "Till things die down."

"Nights are warm now," Isaac said. "Most nights are clear."

"No," he said.

"But why, Eli?" It burst from Sol.

"No," he said. "Not tonight."

The next day was Wednesday. Just before dawn Eli heard Emmy return from the woods, heard her send Jim to the spring for water,

heard her outside fetching wood, and presently heard Sol leave the yard to get on with his plowing. He felt heavy for want of sleep, worn out no doubt with the tension of his body. But more than this, he was sunk in himself, so that even as he went about readying himself for the day that had come he seemed self-absorbed, forgetful of things that at ordinary times he took care about.

He had made his way to open his door, had lifted the bar, and lifted the latch, when he heard the cry out in the yard. With a curious, slow deliberateness, he opened his door and heard the sobs. Annie May Sims stood sobbing there, Emmy, arms around her, soothing her.

“Eli!” Emmy cried. “June was come on last night!”

“Bring her here”—a peculiar flatness in his speech, so remote it sounded, so oddly calm. And it continued to be so every time he spoke—or all but once—throughout that day, and the next, and the next.

“Let her tell me what happened,” Eli said.

As Emmy led her, Annie May flung up her tear-stained face. Fury sounded in her voice.

“I hate them—hate them! I tried to hide him—they busted in the door. They inside—he grovelin’ on the floor, beggin’. They dragged him out—I heard ’em at the woodpile layin’ on the whip—he cryin’ and pleadin’. I jumped out the window, run to Blake’s. Blake had pledged, right at that meetin’, you heard him, Eli, right out loud, like all those others. ‘Come run tell me,’ that’s what he said. I yelled, ‘Mister Blake! They’ve come on June! Ku Klux beatin’ June!’ He come to his window, big fat trash—‘I got a boil, can’t ride my horse!’ ‘You promised!’ I yelled. ‘Can’t,’ he hollered, ‘run tell Squire Colton.’ ‘Ain’t time,’ I yelled. ‘Can’t come,’ he hollered. I run back, Ku Klux gone. June lyin’ on the ground, whimperin’ and cryin’. Makes me so mad—shamed—what ails him?”

“It’s all right,” Emmy comforted her. “He’ll be all right, Annie May.”

“He’s promised something,” Annie May whimpered. “Won’t say what—I know he has. Said he’d have to go to town today. He’s set out on that old mule o’ his. They tore his flesh, it’s a-stickin’ to his shirt, still he would go. I couldn’t stop him.”

“Give her coffee, Emmy. Send Jim for Sol.”

Send Jim for Sol. Eli now saw Sol, on the run, straight across his own planted field, heedless feet pounding young cotton plants.

"Sol!" Emmy screamed. "June was come on!"

Sol tried to speak, coughed, drew a breath.

"Others too. Raids last night, all over the place. Luke too."

"Luke," Eli said, as if to comprehend.

"Arnie ran to tell me," Sol was saying. "Arnie saw 'em, was comin' home late last night, jumped back in the bushes, followed 'long side, men covered, horses too, saw them stop near his pa's place, begin to tether their horses. He ran to Colton's, hollerin' for him. Colton's wife stuck her head out an upstairs window, hollered, 'Go away. He's down in Columbia.' Arnie started to run to Cochrane's, but it was so late, he ran back home. . . . June too, you say? He hurt bad?"

"June's gone to town," Annie May said.

"Was Luke much hurt?" Emmy said.

"They whipped him. Arnie says he's all right."

"Sol," Eli said. "Have you heard of any others?"

"Arnie said he heard them at two-three other places," Sol said. "They must have split up, lots o' bands, different places. It's bad, mighty bad." He wiped the sweat that streamed down his face.

A silence fell between them in the next moments. Eleven-year-old Jim, squatting on the ground, was lifting handful of dirt, and letting the dirt stream slowly through his fingers. Eli, in his doorway, found his eyes watching Jim, watching sand trickle, forming little piles.

And then to his ears came the sound of hoofbeats, still at a distance, but drawing nearer. He glanced at the others. They looked at one another, saying nothing. But now all eyes turned toward the road, watching the bend around which someone would surely come.

Isaac Darrow, mule-back, came on the gallop. He slid from his mule.

"Our house last night"—he was out of breath—"I weren't there. Lyin' out. We'd begged pa, he wouldn't budge. Hit him with their fists. Tried to burn down the schoolhouse—"

"What did you say?" Eli spoke slowly.

"Anna put it out. She'd been watchin'—hidin' in the bushes. They left—she smelled smoke—slid underneath—put it out."

"Old man hurt bad?" Sol muttered.

"He's so danged mad, he won't tell. They busted his squirrel gun on the hearth—he's cursin' our hides for that all the time. Tim got there—he'd been in the woods nearby, Anna bein' there, though she'd told him not to—he'd dropped off to sleep. Tim says he don't think pa's much hurt."

"Was the school much burnt?" Eli said.

"Just a place in the floor," Isaac said. "Anna beat it out. Burnt one hand kind o' bad."

"Others were come on," Sol said.

"Who?" Isaac said.

Sol told him what he knew.

Eli turned away from his doorway. Going to his shelves, he found pencil and paper, and moving to his chair, seated himself. He heard the others leave and enter Sol's house—he could hear their voices. He began to write. Presently, hearing someone on his step, he raised his eyes. Luke stood there, face badly swollen. His gait was stiff as he entered and dropped on Eli's bench.

"I ought to've been laid out," he said wearily. "Wanted some sleep."

"Did they hurt your wife?" Eli said.

"They slapped her and kicked her when she grabbed hold of me."

"Do you know of others?"

"Yes," Luke said. He named three men and two women.

"Why did they whip the women?" Eli said.

"Told Sadie Breen she'd been impudent to her mistress. Carrie Brown wouldn't tell where Ruddy was."

Eli asked Luke to fetch Isaac for him.

"I was just goin' home," Isaac said as he came in.

"You've got to go to town," Eli said, the flatness in his voice. "Go to the troops, tell Colonel Ames he ought to send soldiers out here today. They can at least patrol the highroads. It might protect some."

"Eli," Isaac said. "Do you know how many soldiers Ames has?"

"He might send a few," Eli said.

"Ames has maybe got a hundred men, not many more. And there are two or three thousand white men in the county. No tellin' how many of them are Ku-Kluxers. No use of us askin' Colonel Ames for soldiers. He won't spare them."

"I'm makin' up a list," Eli said. "I'm puttin' down everybody that's been come on. You're to take this list to Colonel Ames. Maybe he'll do something, you can't tell."

"I can see no use." And Isaac burst out shrilly, "We've let them scare us! There're plenty of us! We need Dan!"

"Maybe we do," Eli said. "We ain't got Dan. Go take this list when I've got it ready. I won't be long."

After Isaac had departed, and Luke had gone away, Eli remained for the most part alone. He knew that Sol had not returned to his plowing; he heard him when he sent Jim to fetch the mule that Sol had left standing when he had run home. And he heard Sol moving in and out of his house, heard his voice—it drifted to Eli—as Sol talked to Emmy. Emmy came to straighten his house, and came to fetch him food. Several times Sol put his head in the door, but Eli said that he needed nothing. Once Sol said, "I thought others might come," and to this Eli nodded assent. Sometime in the day Eli noticed the unfinished Liberia letter lying on his table. He picked it up, and the book with the names, and going to his shelf placed them on it. Not once that day did Eli pray although it was his custom in the early morning, and again at night before he slept. It did not occur to him that he had forgotten. Nor did he open his Bible all day, and this he did not notice either. For the most part he remained in his chair, to all appearances absorbed, insensible to his surroundings.

Along toward dusk Tim came afoot, slipping from the woods across the road.

"Eli," he said. "Lie out tonight. It ain't safe, you can see it ain't, with all the ridin' they did last night all over the place, Black Creek too. They are makin' a clean sweep. I know you think just because you're a cripple. . . ." Tim stopped.

"I won't do it," Eli said.

"Could you tell me why?" Tim asked.

"Very likely Colonel Ames will send soldiers out here tonight."

"And if he don't?" Tim said.

"You know what happens, Tim, the way I get a fever. Dampness in the woods, I'd be sure to get it. Then I'd have to stay here anyhow."

"Is that the reason?" Tim said.

"I don't know if I have to give a reason," Eli said. "I won't lie out."

"You're makin' Sol not go to the woods."

"Sol lies out."

"No," Tim said. "Sol's been sleepin' in his barn. He wouldn't leave you."

"Tim." Eli's tone was low and strained. "I can't stand whites' mistreatment of our race! We're humans exactly like they are. Do you think I don't know that they've got to learn this? And even when I've said I wouldn't mix in things, and when I've gone to whites beggin' for peace, and when I've tried to leave this place, do you think I didn't know down deep in my heart why I did it? I hate all this violence! I do want peace! But I've had enough of hidin' things from myself."

And now Eli's fists closed over his stick till his knotted hands looked huge, misshapen. Eyes blazed, low hoarse voice was as though each word were forced through his lips.

"I'll tell Sol he's got to go to the woods. Nobody can make me do it. Tim, if I ever leave this house to go to the woods in fear of them, I tell you what I know—I'll cower all my days before white men. I can't. I won't. I won't be debased. No, Tim. I tell you, no."

Tim, whose eyes had been fixed on Eli's face, now stared at the floor.

"All right, Eli. Stay in your house."

He rose and left Eli alone.

On Thursday they waited for word of Wednesday night. There had been no raids, none in Sand Hollow, and so far as they could learn, none anywhere around. It was late afternoon when Isaac arrived, gaunt-eyed, but obviously excited.

"Come over to Eli's!" he called Sol and Emmy. Tying his mule, he hurried inside.

"They've found their meetin' place!" he said it softly.

"Land sakes, no!" Emmy whispered.

Sol sat staring.

"Go on," Eli said.

"Old Hill place, where you were born in Black Creek district. House tumblin' down, people say it's haunted. Colored man chanced on 'em two nights ago, makin' through the woods way after dark, had taken a short cut tryin' to get home. There they were, ridin' in one by one—he suspicioned something. Couldn't make out no faces, too pitch dark, he scared to get up close. Left their horses in the

tumblin'-down stable. This man waited, sure 'nough, real late, he could see 'em puttin' on their robes, pullin' white coverings over the horses, waited and saw 'em start out. That man began to run, didn't stop till he got to troop headquarters!"

"Lord God A'mighty!" Emmy gasped.

"How'd you find out?" Sol exclaimed.

"What is Colonel Ames goin' to do?" Eli said.

"When I got to headquarters," Isaac said, "this man was there. He'd been tellin' Colonel Ames, they'd sent him back outside, told him to wait, he'd been waitin' all day. He told me himself. And while I was there Ames called him back in. Ames was sendin' soldiers—this man whispered it to me—sendin' 'em out one by one, they goin' to meet somewhere, and creep up on the place and watch, this man was goin' to guide them. They're goin' to try to catch those Ku-Kluxers."

"Ain't it fine!" Emmy whispered.

"Did you give Ames the list?" Eli said.

"I gave it to him," Isaac said. "He asked me some questions. But he was real busy."

"Can we come in?"

Emmy jumped, and Sol and Isaac whirled around.

"It's just Tim," Eli said.

Behind Tim stood Anna Darrow, and old man Darrow, and Janie, Dan's two children with her.

"News, big news!" Emmy burst out.

"Better let 'em come in." Sol put a hand on Emmy. "Let Isaac tell them."

They listened, though in a quiet manner. Perhaps it was Janie sitting there with them, and Dan's little children, who would not leave their mother though she had pushed them gently toward the door, saying, "Go find Jim." Darrow and Tim and Anna asked Isaac questions, and the tale was finished.

Tim rose and stood, back to the chimneypiece.

"It's getting' late. We've come here for something. Eli," Tim said soberly. "Anna and me would like you to wed us, wed us right now."

"God A'mighty!" Isaac burst out. "What on earth made her give in, Tim?"

"Shut up, Isaac," though Anna said it gently, half-smiling.

"It's high time," old Darrow muttered.

"It's fine," Sol said.

"As you all see"—Tim spoke dryly—"I ain't lettin' grass grow under my feet. Anna gave in that night after Ku-Kluxers had left. I persuaded her today to wed me now. I know it's a mighty poor time. But I don't aim to wait." He reached over and took Anna's hand, drawing her to her feet to stand beside him. "Will you do it, Eli?"

Eli let his gaze rest on each one, first on Tim, then on Anna.

"I'll do it, Tim," Eli said. "Do it gladly."

A sudden odd quiet had fallen on the room. Emmy broke it—"I'd better call Jim!" and went to the door, yelling lustily.

As Jim ran in, Eli was saying, "All stand up."

The next day was Friday, May 26. As the day wore on still no news of raids. There had now been none since Tuesday night.

"It must be the soldiers," Emmy said to Eli. "It must be findin' their meetin' place. Maybe things'll let up, they ought to know."

Eli did not answer Emmy, but, as in preceding days, appeared silent and absorbed.

The county weekly paper had come out the day before. Late that Friday a man brought it to Eli.

Eli glanced at the paper, though he found no mention of the Sand Hollow colored people who had been raided by disguised bands during the week preceding. However, one item was there from Sand Hollow. As Eli turned the page he came upon it.

A CARD

Mr. Editor: Please announce in your paper my withdrawal from the Radical Party. I will not vote the Radical Republican ticket any more.

June Sims.

A little while later a runner came. He sought out Sol, and Sol and Emmy talked, then Sol made his way to Eli's house. Eli still sat, the paper spread open, though at this time he did not show it to Sol.

"Tim has called a meetin', I don't know what for. I'll be gone awhile tonight."

"You'd be gone anyway," Eli said. "I've told you, Sol, you've got to lie out."

“Emmy figures things will be quiet here tonight, those soldiers watchin’ out. She and Jim are goin’ to stay in the house.”

“She ought not to, Sol.”

“She wants some good sleep,” Sol said. “I’ll be back ’long toward mornin’.”

5

Air smelled sweet and clean and fresh on that May night as in other years. Before he slipped the bar in place, Eli stayed in his doorway awhile. Even in the dark he could sniff the scents that always meant May to him, see in his mind's eye what night hid—wildflowers, leaves at their softest, tenderest green, woods' young growth. Sol would be slipping through woods now, feet feeling out those rough paths, or skirting plowed fields, maybe wading a branch, shoes squelching from the water they took. Sol had said Stony River Woods, deep in the forest, a good safe place. It would take him an hour, maybe more, and an hour to return, maybe one or two there.

Eli turned away from his door, closing it with care—still the hinges creaked—and pushing the heavy bar into place. Presently he heard Emmy's bars slide and thump. So she had stayed in—he had thought she might go, or at the least, sleep in the barn.

When at last he lay down on his bed it occurred to him that he ought to pray, and he tried to summon words. None took form, though. As if in hope that main strength might do it, he thrust out his arms, pressing palms hard against the wall, as if to push away the heavy cloud that had enveloped him for so many days, hiding from him heavenly things. Nor would Scripture verses say themselves, one way he sometimes took in wooing sleep when it was slow to come: curious how he could think of none, none, that is, that he cared to say. Then of what would he think while he lay here and listened?

He jerked himself upright, feeling out his shelves that were fastened to the wall above his bed. Feverish hands touched his clock, felt of his books, felt out a candlestick, candle in it, found what he sought—the little book with Liberia names, and the unfinished letter protruding from it. Where—where? No, he told himself, and let the book drop on his bed, made his hands lie limp beside it. Now think, he told himself. He reached down beside his bed, felt out a

loose board there that Sol long since had meant to fix, and slipped the book in the narrow crack. Once more he laid himself down.

Heavy clouds overspread the sky that night, letting no glimmer of starlight through. He thought of it now as he had seen it from his doorway, the stillness everywhere, the way nothing stirred, no breath of wind, no sway of trees. Sounds would carry on a night like this. And around his house it was silent and black, so that Sol's cabin had been only a blur against the rise of the hill behind. Of course human eyes grew accustomed to the night, seeing what at first could not be seen.

He began to sleep in fitful snatches, sinking for a moment, then starting up, and despite all his willing, his body drenched with the sudden sweat that burst from his pores.

Eli's senses had drifted far, perhaps to the threshold of exhausted slumber, so that what the hour was he did not know. Nor could Emmy guess when she came to tell Sol, for as she said, though against her intention, she had dropped off to sleep. Hammering at his brain came faint sounds. In a distant barnyard dogs' frenzied barking, and somewhere on a road a faint clop-clop, faint, yet quite unmistakable sound.

How Eli came to reach his chair he never knew. He found himself seated upright there, panting for breath, the drumming in his ears still so loud he could not hear whether he had heard aright. He was fully clothed, not having undressed, though his loosened garments were now twisted on his body; his jacket he had left lying on his bed; it would have to stay there. He waited, listening.

Was he hearing now? Not horsemen anymore, and it might still be the throbbing in his ears. Or else sound of soft footfalls, men afoot who shuffled along, feeling out their way on strange dark ground. Very many nights he had heard these sounds, this might be another such night.

Not on other nights what came now though still not yet on his own threshold, but yonder, forty yards away. First the sounds of heavy blows, fists that pounded on Sol's door, then the yell.

"OPEN UP—BLACK BASTARD YOU!"

So they had come.

Eli heard succeeding sounds, not one but stayed etched on his brain. He noted things, their yells to heave, the log's loud crash, the

splintering door, Emmy's screams, the words of Emmy's futile lie that he was gone—in the woods. And then the nearer telltale yell, as if a mouth were pressed against his thin board walls, against his head, it felt so close, the words, "Found—over here—I've found his house." Then he heard the rush of feet from Sol's place.

The shuffling feet, round and round outside his house—he heard these too—back and front; heard the hands that brushed his walls, that found his steps, heard the mutters, heard the "Heave," felt the crash—it shook his floor.

And when the sturdy bar gave way, until his door swung crazily on one hinge, he felt the wind that now had risen and had cleaved a hole in the heavy clouds, felt it sweep through his shattered door, and knew it had let the light of stars temper the darkness outside his house. He himself sat lost to sight within the blackness of his room. Not so they—blurs against the night, curious, shapeless, shadowy things; though they were men—he had this thought—no more, no less; and what moved them?—he did not know; while they stood there, as though his gaping doorway held them back, long robes, caught by gusts of rising wind, swaying and billowing.

He saw and heard and knew these things. But they had come. In some way he did not probe but only sensed, he was not reached.

He let them search, heard shuffling feet, brush of hands. They touched his shelves—his clock crashed, he heard it go, and heard the voice float from his yard, a warning voice, "Careful—careful inside there—it's him we want." And knew their hands had reached his bed—their loud breathing told him this, their muttered words. Though when they did not find him there, they raised their tones, exclaimed, called out, exchanged remarks with those outside, set up a din. Then quiet fell, they searched again. "Make a light." "No, won't do." "Cowerin' somewhere—hidin' out"—he heard this said.

"No," he said. "I am here in my chair."

He heard the scream, a queer foul thing, and felt their hands on his flesh. Perhaps no thought could reach him then, no plain clear picture in his head or words that formed and spoke to him. And yet he knew. Their power was spent. He knew that he would find his peace.



May air still had that smell, clean and fresh, as Sol came home, though cool from the breeze that had sprung up. Little woods animals now scurried as if to make the most of the time, knowing well that dawn approached. Sol hurried, lengthening his stride, sometimes breaking into a run.

He found first his shattered door when in the dark he lifted a hand to give a tap, let Emmy know.

"Emmy! O—Almighty God!"

"Sol, honey, sh—h! I'm here."

"Emmy!" Flying feet, flying feet to Eli's door.

"Emmy, Emmy," Sol sobbed, clutching her.

"I'm all right, Sol."

"Did they harm you? Tell me, Emmy."

"Not really, Sol. Just slapped a few times."

"Emmy, I told you, begged you not—"

"I couldn't leave a crippled man alone, Sol. They came on Eli. It's Eli, Sol."

"Yes." He dropped his arms.

The room was not completely dark, because of coals, almost dead, left from a blaze that Emmy had started. Sol stood staring down at Eli.

"He was bad hurt?"

"Yes," Emmy said.

"You tended him?"

"As best I could. Tore up a sheet, bound the places."

"He's asleep?" They were speaking in whispers.

"I reckon not. Ain't come to—it seems like that. Not since they left."

"I'll look at the places. Not now though, won't bother him."

"Jim ran to tell whites, Sol."

Sol whirled. "He's all right?"

"He's all right—asleep on that pallet. Real tired."

"Ran to Colton's?"

"First to Hodges—he just cursed. Then to Colton's. Colton pretended, said all right, then said, no, it was too late. Jim ain't been back very long. He dropped right off, poor child."

"Tell me, Emmy. I'll have to know. Tell me what happened," Sol said.

"Sol, he said nothin'. All that time, he said not a single word."

"Where were you, Emmy?"

"They had me right outside, one held me, that was at first."

"You saw what they did?"

"Keep your voice down, Sol. Right at first they did nothin'. Just talked, kept on talkin' to him. I thought maybe they'd let him off. Told him he had to behave, told him he'd wronged whites. But they'd forgive if he'd put in a card like June did—Sol, did you know June had done that?"

"They told me tonight. Go on, Emmy."

"They didn't hit him right at first, kept on as if to persuade. That leader kept talkin', said they'd put him back in his bed right then and there, nobody would molest him again, if he'd stop votin' Radical, quit the Union League, put in a card sayin' so."

"Go on, Emmy. Hasten if you can."

"He wouldn't answer. That got 'em mad. Made me go fetch his lamp. I slipped back inside his house, hid there behind his door where I could see, heard nearly everything. They were crowded round. One of them held his lamp, light shinin' down on top his head where they had him on the ground. Sol, it was awful!"

"Will you go on, Emmy?"

"Said they were goin' to tell him his sins, said he had plenty writ down in their book. Told him he'd promised to compromise—never did intend to keep his promise; told him he'd egged on Dan to make clashes—told him remember what had happened to Dan; told him he'd kept on with Union League—told him they knew that he was president; told him he'd been writing to somebody up in Washington complainin' of Ku Klux, wanted the letter; told him he'd been gettin' their field hands all excited, all this Liberia—they roared about that. That's when it happened."

"Tell me then."

"Sol, they began to hit and kick."

"I saw him. Go on, Emmy."

"Let out some groans. But, Sol, he said nothin'."

"Yes. What else?"

"That leader hollered to them to stop. Told him then they'd still let him off if he'd give them that list with Liberia names, and give them the letter he'd wrote the Congressman."

"The list! Did they find it?"

"They didn't find it. He wouldn't tell them. They sent two to look, I was hid behind the door. Sol, I heard them talk. One was Tom Reese—I've known him ever since he was little. Moreover, the other one called him 'Tom.' It was him."

"What more, Emmy?"

"Eli must of hid those things. All they found was his little book, the one he keeps his school accounts in. Tried to make him read from it, then one o' them began to read. One or two laughed."

"Didn't make 'em mad?"

"Made the leader mad. Sent them back to look again. Told Eli he had one last chance. Stood waitin'. Eli didn't say one word. Then that leader roared out something. . . . Sol, they laid on the lash."

They had been seated on Eli's bench, the one farthest away from his bed. Sol rose and went to stand in the doorway, though first, and as if it called for care, he propped the shattered door to one side. It was dawn, growing lighter each moment. A hen with her brood was already out, busily scratching in the yard.

Emmy came and stood beside Sol.

"Sol, he didn't scream but just the one time. After that I don't believe he knew anything."

"Is there more?" Sol said.

"They made me tote him in. And they came in too, all except the big one who did the whippin', and the leader. Others followed me in, all covered over, heads, bodies, long white coverings. One of them fetched the lamp. I didn't know what else they aimed to do."

"Go on, finish."

"They did nothin', Sol. Don't know why they came. Just stood there, like as if they couldn't leave, didn't know how to. He opened his eyes once or twice, shut them again, maybe knew nothin', I don't know. One of them, and he didn't even disguise his voice—just a boy, I could tell, I was standin' right there—bent down and laid that little schoolbook of Eli's on the bed by him, said, 'Here's your little schoolbook, Eli.' And he went out. Then the others went, kind of hurried then, as if they couldn't get out soon enough. All but one. Sol, you know who he was? Know how Doc Reuben always says to Eli, when he tends him, soundin' kind o' drunk?—'Pray for us, Preacher, We sure need it.' It was Doc Reuben. Drunk, Sol. That's what he said."

“Did Eli hear?”

“That time he did. Opened his eyes, stared a minute. And said just as plain as I say to you, ‘Lord God, make them know their shame.’ That white man said, ‘That will do very well.’ Drunk, of course. Then he left. . . . It was a while before Jim got here.”

“Go fix some coffee, Emmy. It’s daylight now. Then come and stay with him, I better go find Tim. And I’ll get Anna to come and help you.”

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4

A Way



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It was the busy season. Fresh furrows showed in all the fields. Hoes were out, just as many hoes as hands could be found. Men and women, old and young, regardless of the nights and what they held, must be out between the rows weeding and chopping. So it was on this Saturday in late May, for even on Saturdays at this time of year, work continued from early to late. And hence it was here, while at their work, that most people learned of the night before.

They had come on the Preacher. They had whipped a crippled man.

Nobody could have said who came with the word, which place heard it first, from which field it began to spread, to which one it was carried next. No doubt it ran like ripples from a pebble, one field heard it and took it up, somebody bore the word to another place, a fresh messenger went racing with it through bush and woods and across pastureland. Some heard and went back to their hoeing; others dropped hoes and walked away; others seemed to wish to cling together, and huddled to talk, though with little to say. So that up and down the entire district, even in corners remote from Eli's place, by the time the sun was well overhead, the word was known as a positive truth.

Off somewhere in a corner of the county, word of Eli had reached Peter Baldwin. He had started out afoot, taking byways, as was his habit in these days, moving swiftly from place to place, mostly by night so the Ku Klux, as he put it, "wouldn't know he'd got there and take it out on others." Roundabout paths had taken longer than high roads, but toward dawn of Sunday he had arrived. Sol came out soon after daybreak, and, as he had done Sundays without number, pail in hand, had started toward his spring. Baldwin came forward.

"Saw smoke risin', knew you'd be out soon."

They exchanged a few words. Sol nodded toward the barn, whistling softly. Tim Moore stepped from it, followed by Isaac Darrow and a few other men. They gathered round Baldwin.

Now they heard Eli's door creak. Anna appeared, broom in hand.

"She and Emmy," Sol said, "take turns tendin' him."

"We'll be goin' now," Isaac said. "Be back tonight."

Tim nodded, and the three watched the others go.

"I'll fetch Emmy her water," Sol said.

When Tim took Baldwin in, Eli appeared to doze.

"He does that a lot," Anna murmured.

The chair scraped. He opened his eyes, and seeing Baldwin, lifted a hand. Baldwin sat beside him until the hour of meeting and then left to go preach for him. The day lagged though at last Sol returned, bringing Baldwin back. Together they unhitched the mule and together lingered near the barn. They saw Anna come down Eli's steps and made her way to Emmy's house. From Emmy's chimney smoke drifted, betokening the meal that she prepared for them.

"A man's business," Baldwin said, "is to think of something he can do. I've said it to myself a thousand times."

"That's right," Sol said absently.

"And not to rage and beat his head against bein' helpless," Baldwin said.

"Yes, that's right," Sol said.

"Sol, six years don't make over men. Whites, I reckon, feel just like they used to. But a crippled man."

Still they lingered.

"Sol," Baldwin said. "I heard something over yonder. Is it so—is Giles Turner a traitor?"

"We were meetin' on it that very night! Elder, he knew I would not be at home!"

"He was at the meetin'?"

"Yes, he came, not knowing why we met—Tim had kept the reason to himself. Giles caught on soon enough. Nobody knew when he slipped away in the dark. A trusted man. Betrayin' Dan. Betrayin' a cripple. Elder, I can't talk about it yet—I boil so!"

"You all are sure? Just tell me that."

"Tim had proof. Giles was overheard talkin' to Jack Temple one night in Clayville—had met him in the dark. Last night in town Tim learned that Giles had gone, nobody knows where."

"Any word about that Ku-Klux meetin' place?"

"No Ku-Kluxers came, troops finally left. Tim heard about it in town last night. That could o' been Giles's work too, no tellin'."

"Sol, did Eli recognize any?"

"We don't know yet, but Emmy did."

"Colonel Ames knows?"

"He knows all we know. Tim went to troop headquarters yesterday."

One week from the day he was beaten, Eli arose from his bed. Impatient at arguing, he pulled himself around, reached for his stick, and demanded clothes. Anna fled to get the men's help—she who had never been known to be helpless. Sol and Tim did no better, but meekly sought out what Eli called for, an old cotton shirt and soft loose pantaloons, most of his wounds having yet to heal. They helped him dress, and handling him gently, while he derided them for their pains, they carried him to his chair where it waited, placed near his open door. Emmy brought his supper and they went to theirs; the voices came floating to him through the dusk. They lingered at their meal, and with this he felt content, remaining in his doorway, sitting quite erect, as if to make the most of being upright. His face in repose watched the evening shadows hover awhile, and then drew close.

The following day Luke Judson appeared to tell a tale of the night before. Luke worked on Squire Colton's place. Eli made only one remark while Luke told his story. "Don't interrupt," he said to someone who broke in. "Let Luke finish."

Luke was helping Ezekiel at his forge when he saw Squire Colton on his back veranda. Hands were coming in from the fields. Plow hands were watering their mules and turning them loose in the little pasture. Field hands, men, women and children, were bringing their hoes to stack them in the shelter. Luke saw Colton call the head driver Joshua to him, and saw Joshua go and fetch his cow horn. When Joshua blew his horn a long mournful blast, folks turned and stared and walked over to him; he spoke to them; they went toward the big house. There must have been around a hundred people there.

Everybody gathered, Colton held up his hand. He was holding a newspaper in his hand. He did not talk loud, but his voice could be

heard, since people had become very quiet. He said that what he held was the county newspaper. He began to read from it about people going to Liberia. Everything they'd planned was written there, and that Eli Hill was arranging matters.

After reading Colton began to talk and still he hardly raised his voice, so Luke said. He told them he had heard that some of them were going. That was all right with him, though they were foolish, ran a big risk, not even being sure that they would have bread when they got there. He didn't know why they wanted to go. But they had the right, they were free, they could go anywhere they pleased.

However, Colton said, he owed money for them at Birch's store. Not just for corn meal and meat, but for calico, nails, headkerchiefs, sugar, tobacco, things like that. He had let them buy, trusting them. As far as he could see, they had planned to go right on taking advances, piling up debts that he would have to pay when his cotton was sold. Now, he told them, this newspaper said that they were leaving sometime in October. How did they think his cotton would get picked by darkies who were somewhere riding on a ship? Could he sell cotton that hung in the boll? Before many weeks it would be laying-by, they wouldn't be doing much work for awhile. But they expected to eat. Did they think he could carry them from now till October, and they pick up and leave him, half his cotton rotting in the fields, leaving him with no means to pay their debts? He was not mad, he said. He wished them no harm. But he had somehow to protect himself.

It came down to this, Luke said he told them: that any who were going would have to move out of their cabins within the month. He would get other hands. If they planned to break their contracts in the fall, he would be obliged to call them off now. Any who were going were to move off his land by July 1, not a day later.

"They can't eat," Anna said.

"I asked him that," Luke said. "Said, 'Boss, how would folks eat between now and October, if you turned them off? Store wouldn't trust them, except a white man said so.' He said, 'Luke, if you're one who's goin', that's your own lookout. I'll have to tell Mr. Birch that you're movin' off my place, I can't pay for your furnish any longer.'"

Eli did not ask Luke what he would do, nor did Luke speak of it for the time being. The others talked a little, though they acted

subdued, as if each one were thinking matters over. Nor did Eli join in their exchanges, but sat, absent-eyed, as though he barely heard them. Later that same Sunday other men came from Cochrane's and Abel's and Blake's and other places, their stories very like the one Luke had told, so that Emmy remarked, "Whites sure had a meetin'."

June Sims was the first one of the long procession that began around Wednesday of that same week. Eli had not seen June since the "card" in the paper. June failed to look at Eli but slumped down on the steps, and with his sleeve wiped his grimy face. Eli eyed him a moment from his chair inside his door, though then he let his eyes turn away.

"I just come from plowin'." June mumbled his words.

"It's been a hot day," Eli said.

"I can't go, Eli."

"You mean Liberia, June?"

"Mr. Blake is turnin' me off next week. We ain't even got a place to sleep. Annie May wants us to move to Clayville, she take in washings. I don't know what to do."

"You could try it," Eli said.

"We can't starve, Eli. I can't let my children starve."

"No," Eli said. "You can't do that."

"If I told Mr. Blake I won't go he might keep me on, you can see that."

"Yes, I reckon, June."

"My children can't starve. I can't go, Eli. How could I go?"

"I'll write and tell them, June."

June jumped to his feet. Leaning inside Eli's doorway, he put his face close to Eli's face.

"You ought to go soon!"—he hissed the words. "They're after you! You oughtn't to wait!"

"Hush, June!" Eli gave him a push.

"I won't hush. They'll come on you again. Eli, put in that card! I thought I did wrong, but it kept them off. Nobody would blame you—a crippled man. Put it in, Eli. It's your duty to protect yourself. Can you do good, beat to a pulp? Put in that card. Then soon as you can, leave this place. Go, go——"

"June!" Eli stared fiercely into June's face.

June sank down on the step, fumbling with his cap. "I meant it for the best." Presently he mumbled, "Reckon I'll be goin'," though he seemed at a loss, hardly knowing how to leave, until finally he rose and made his way on the pasture path.

Several men came the following day, having already discussed it among themselves.

"I want to go," one man said. "But if I went, what could I do 'tween now and then? How get us victuals? If one won't have us, another won't hire."

"I'm scared to go, Preacher," another said. "Mr. Cochrane keeps sayin' that we are deceived, that people go out there and die, it's so unhealthy. I'm beginnin' to feel it's maybe better to keep what we know."

"What I say is," a third man said, "'tween now and then, what will happen to us? White men are in a high temper. Roy Sommers told me he'd sic the Sheriff on me, put me in jail if I broke my contract. Those disguised men'll keep comin' on us, beat us to a jelly, we couldn't go nohow."

"But they've got no right to keep us here!" another said.

"How'll we eat 'tween now and goin'?" the first man said.

"Yes, I can see," Eli kept answering. "I understand. . . . Yes, I'll write."

So it began, so it continued, day after day throughout that week. They came in a trickle, later in a stream, and soon were merely sending word by others—"Preacher write them. Me and mine can't go on that ship." Picking up his pencil he would scratch out the names, until before long he had to look closely at the pages of his little Liberia book to find any there having no line through them.

Eli, it seems, felt no surprise, to this extent he had prepared himself. But when they urged, as some men did, "Preacher, don't delay. You go soon. White men are mighty down on you," while he was able to curb his tongue, he could not control the look that flamed up in his eyes. Yet it died down quickly, for he knew they meant only kindness toward him.

Sol and Tim had several times talked to him, probing him to remember all he could as to those he had recognized on that night. And Tim had passed on all Eli had said to Colonel Ames, and Ames had sent back the insistent word, he must be sure.

Until even to himself it began to sound feeble to say, "But, Sol, Rob Abel used his natural voice—he forgot that time." Abel's voice when persuading. And could he forget those kind mellow tones, and he up high on Zeke's back, and the new master there on his veranda, telling how their old master had died, and how they must help their old mistress bear her grief, work hard, obey. . . . Or say, "But, Sol, you know Roy Sommers' scar." That evil jagged scar on his right hand, the hand that lots of black people knew another time had swung a lash, and the slave he was whipping had sunk his teeth into that hand. . . . And say, "Jack Temple's mask slipped, the time he put the book beside me."

Thus, when on a June evening (perhaps a fortnight had passed since Eli had risen from his bed) as he sat thinking of the few remaining names on his Liberia list, and Sol came over, Eli supposed that it meant more probing, more insistent inquiries from Colonel Ames.

"That new-cleared land," Sol told Eli, "is plumb full o' roots. I have to take care lest I break my plow tongue. It wears a man out."

They sat awhile, as they often did, in silence. However, on this evening Sol seemed moody and Eli soon withdrew into himself.

"I'd figured on talkin' matters over last Sunday," Sol finally said. "All those people here."

"What matters?" Eli said.

"I been thinkin' a lot these days—behind the plow a man gets time, it seems like. It ain't, Eli, that we don't want you here. You know I was mighty sorry when you planned to go."

"What were you thinkin', Sol?"

"It's about the goin'. Tim and the others can't go on forever guardin' the place to keep off the Ku-Klux."

"I told them to quit," Eli said. "I thought they had."

"They won't stop, and they are right. Some say that Ku-Kluxin' has been stopped, that this new Ku-Klux law has made them. There've been no raids since you were come on. But a few weeks, Eli, ain't enough time to judge. They stopped a long time after Dan was killed."

"So what are you sayin'?"

"That you ought to go. Go soon as you can. Maybe stay down in Charleston till that ship sails."

"You used to say, stay."

"They hadn't come on you then."

"But they have now. It changes things, Sol. I can't go down to Charleston like you say."

"But, Eli, you don't seem to realize — man, don't you know they might come on you again?"

"Yes, I know it. But I can't leave now. I'm satisfied that I'm right to stay."

"Eli, October is a long way off."

"I know it, Sol, even better than you."

Ben Strong bore the latest word to Sand Hollow. He came riding through the haze of the hot late afternoon on the day following Ernie Shaw's escape. Sol and Tim, who was also there, tied Strong's horse and loosened the girth. The three men settled on Eli's steps.

"I been wantin' to come." Strong looked up at Eli.

"There was no need to bother," Eli said.

"I was mighty sorry you missed the graduation."

"Yes," Eli said. "How many boys finished up this year?"

"Six. Four to teach schools already waitin' for them."

"Sol," Eli said. "I've been tellin' you it's time Jim went to Mr. Strong's school."

"He's all we've got, Eli. It ain't as if we'd had any more."

"He'd come back. He wants to, I know."

"He's said little of it," Sol said. "Still, it would be fine. Mr. Strong, you reckon you could take Jim?"

"Let me have him next autumn," Strong said.

Sol started toward his house. "Emmy! Where are you, Emmy?" From a distance came their voices, Sol's, then Emmy's, in excited speech.

"Reverend Hill."

Eli looked down at Strong.

"There's bad news from town," Strong said.

Tim watched Strong's face.

"Convictin' these men rested on Ernie Shaw, the Ku-Kluxer who'd been tellin' on them. Colonel Ames said it could be done no other way. They had Shaw, but yesterday he slipped away. Somebody helped him, he's out of reach now, they believe he's on his way to Canada."

"It don't depend only on Shaw," Eli said.

"The Colonel says he can't convict on suspicions."

"I know and he knows," Eli said.

"I haven't told you all," Strong said. "Temple's boy has left town, gone to Richmond."

"Who else?" Tim said.

"They think Reuben Arnold. Matter of fact—curious business—Arnold came to me."

"Why?" Eli said.

"He didn't exactly say. Half-drunk of course. Mighty upset. Middle of the night. Acted like he was tryin' to purge himself, though he talked around things, gave nothin' away."

Eli watched a hen as she nestled her brood.

"I went to Colonel Ames," Strong said, "first thing next mornin'. He was busy, but they told me Arnold was on his way there, so I went away again, supposin' he would talk. I was busy at school, didn't get back till afternoon. Arnold hadn't come. Ames right away went lookin' for him again. He couldn't be found, hasn't been found since."

"They got him away," Tim said.

"Yes," Strong said, and looked up at Eli. "Ames might have made him talk. I'm mighty sorry."

"They're that way," Eli said.

"I don't know what they're made of!" Strong said. "You maybe think I ought—bein' white myself."

"We don't think you ought," Eli said.

"I came here with something else on my mind."

Tim glanced at Strong.

"This business ain't over. I'm sure that's so. I know they've passed this Ku-Klux law. And I know those Congressmen are comin' down here to investigate—that might make 'em run to cover. Or it might just make 'em turn loose again to shut people's mouths. They won't give up, that's sure and certain."

"Like as not," Tim said.

"I was wonderin'," Strong said to Tim, not to Eli, "if he couldn't go and stay down in Charleston a little while anyhow. It ain't healthy country for him up here right now."

"You can say it to me," Eli said, and coming through the doorway his voice sounded remote. "I'll be the one to say, nobody else."

"Of course," Strong said.

"I'm obliged to you," Eli said. "It ain't that I'm unmindful of all folks try to do. But some things a man has got to do for himself."

"Of course," Strong said. He rose, saying, "I'll be mighty glad to have young Jim in the autumn."

"Yes," Eli said. "Jim wants it mighty bad. He makes me think of me when I was little."

Presently they heard Strong's horse's hoofs clatter across Rock Creek bridge.

A few days later Judge Temple came. Young Jim was chopping cotton and heard the buggy wheels roll across the bridge. He looked up the road, and dropping his hoe, took the shortest cut back to his house. "Judge Temple's comin'!" he told his mother. The buggy was still on the road. Emmy slammed her door and bolted it. "Run tell your Uncle Eli, quick Jim!"

"Judge Temple?" Eli said. He was seated halfway between the two open doors to get any breeze on this warm June day. He still was dressed in his old soft garments, although more than three weeks had passed.

Tim, who was with him, went and closed the front door, and also pulled the front blind to.

"Tim," Eli said, "hand me my good clothes."

"Eli, you can't put on those clothes. Those places ain't all healed. Moreover, you don't have to see the Judge."

"Get my clothes, Tim."

"Eli——"

"And when he comes to the door, tell him I'll be ready in a minute. Here, help me put these on. Breeches don't hurt much, just around the waist. All right, keep the jacket, Emmy ironed this white shirt real nice".

Soon they heard the buggy wheels come to a stop. They heard a loud rap on Sol's door, and Temple calling, "Anybody home?"

"Lift me to my door, Tim. Now open it."

Temple must have heard the creak of Eli's door opening.

"Good day," he said, walking over to the step.

"I'd about decided nobody was at home."

"Tim," Eli said. "Will you bring the Judge a chair? Would you like it inside or outside, Judge?"

"It's shady here. I won't sit—just got a few minutes." Three steps led up to Eli's door. Temple put a foot on the second step and rested an arm on his knee. With his buggy whip he began a soft tap-tap on the step.

"I had wanted to get here before now," he said. "I was terribly shocked by what was done to you. It has stayed on my mind." Temple stopped, hesitating. "I believe we've got the situation well in hand now. We don't intend to tolerate any more such deeds in Sand Hollow. I tell you this to relieve your mind."

"I thank you, Judge," Eli said.

Temple cast a sharp look at Eli and glanced at Tim. Tim stood behind Eli, eyes fixed on Temple's horses.

"Squire Colton," Temple said, "is as much exercised as I am. He said he came to see you next day. I reckon they told you."

"My brother's little boy ran to him that night."

"Squire Colton told me so, said he'd even got dressed, but then realized that the band would have gone. . . . Eli, we can't get anywhere if you're going to act antagonistic. I came here to help."

"How help, Judge?"

"I'm greatly disturbed at what I hear about you. White people have come to distrust you, Eli. You've gained a reputation, rightly or not, of keeping colored people in a state of excitement. I warned you before that white men had grown desperate. Now this Liberia agitation—"

"Yes, Judge?"

"Eli, I don't like your tone of voice." Temple closed his lips a moment. "I don't deny your right to go to Liberia or anywhere else. Your race is free. It's the fever you've whipped up, the spurious promises of what they'd find. It's very wrong, Eli. You've misled your people."

For a moment it looked as though Temple might leave, he stood erect and looked toward his buggy. But then he turned back and spoke again.

"The investigating committee from Washington I understand is on its way here. They are saying in Clayville that you will testify—the way they put it, rightly or wrongly, 'will go before those Congressmen and tell lies.' They say you have sent in a list of names accusing certain white gentlemen of having been in the band that raided you. That you intend to tell of other alleged whippings, and

name names of men of good standing—indeed, you may already have done so—accusing them. They are saying that the committee majority, being Radical, and prejudiced against southern people in favor of your race, and you, being a cripple who was molested, you will be believed, no matter how wild your accusations. Eli, this Ku-Klux law, so-called, is a terrible threat to life and liberty for our people. Nobody has the right—they are saying this—to bandy about unproven charges. Eli, I tell you this for your own good.”

“They’re not unproved charges, Judge.”

“You don’t mean to claim you recognized some? Eli, I’m trying to hold my temper, and I’ll ask you to keep a civil tongue.”

“Are you tellin’ me not to testify, Judge?”

“Not telling you. Advising you, for your own good. It’s utterly wicked to make unproven charges.”

“Supposin’ I believed it wicked not to make the charges? What would happen, Judge? Is that what you have come to tell me?”

“I have come to try to help you. You show antagonism. I can’t understand what has happened to you, Eli. I determined to come here to urge you, for your own good, go away. You’re planning to go. Go away now, don’t delay a day longer than you have to.”

“You said you all had matters well in hand, Judge.”

“Your offensiveness. . . . We intend to do our best, but sometimes bad elements come from the outside.”

“Bad elements, Judge?”

“I feel it’s my duty,”—Temple spoke coldly—“to warn you most solemnly. Eli, you can still turn back from the path you’ve taken.”

“What path, Judge?”

“The path of reckless, defiant flaunting of every principle that the white man holds dear.”

“Judge, the colored man likewise holds things dear.”

“Eli, have you forgotten all you ever knew?”

“No, Judge, but I know more now.”

“I try to excuse you because of what happened.”

“There’s no call to excuse me, Judge.”

“You don’t fit in here. I tell myself, your affliction has warped you. I say once more, go away, Eli. It’s best for everybody, best for yourself.”

“Judge, the ship don’t sail till October.”

“Then go up North, take a ship from there. No doubt you lack money. I’m willing to help you. And it’s not just to get you out of the way. I don’t bribe—I would not stoop to such a thing.”

“I can’t take it, Judge.”

“You’re terribly foolish, I wish you’d realize it!”

“That is as may be, Judge.”

“Don’t you understand, men’s passions once aroused are hard to subdue. It’s quieter now, but how can I tell? Heaven’s name”—Temple’s voice rose—“do you want to be come on and horsewhipped again?”

“No, Judge.”

“I’m trying to save you!”

“I thank you, Judge, but I can’t go away.”

“Eli, I cannot understand you.”

Temple had been gone for awhile when Eli spoke.

“Tim,” he said. “I wrote that committee of Congressmen, tellin’ them about how I was come on and sending them the names of those I recognized. I’ll be gettin’ a summons by and by.”

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5

The Hearing



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Hearing before three members of the Joint Select Committee of the United States Congress, taking testimony on the “Ku Klux Conspiracy.”

PLACE: Yorkville, South Carolina

TIME: July 25, 1871

The room grew quiet as Eli Hill was carried in, though a man’s feet scraping and a cough broke the stillness, while several men began a steady fanning of themselves, as if the July noonday had become more oppressive. And when Tim Moore, who brought Eli in, took his way across the floor to seat Eli in the chair appointed for him, signs of a room ill-at-ease multiplied; eyes watched fascinated, unable to desist; faces grew constrained, a few appeared to redden.

Tim Moore let Eli down from astride his back. Using both hands, Eli shifted his legs, straightening out their withered length; they hung there limply; and he gripped the chair arms and shoved himself back. Having done this, he sat erect, eyes fixed on the bare wall opposite him. Tim glanced down at him, his face saying nothing, and looked toward the three men ranged behind the table. The man in the center gave a stiff nod. Tim turned on his heel and strode through the doorway. When the marshall closed the door, Eli’s eyes fixed on it, while the dim bare room seemed to echo men’s breathing. Watt’s voice broke abruptly on the curious disquiet.

“Reverend Hill.”

Frowning slightly, Eli turned and met Watt’s eyes; thereupon his gaze took in the entire room, as if only now he found himself present.

There were only whites. So mean and small a room, they filled up the place, settled back against their wall, leaving not much

See the Note on the Text for our treatment of this section, which was not integrated into the manuscript of the novel used as the copy text. Lumpkin fictionalized the names of persons except for Eli Hill. —Eds.

distance—it appeared little—between him and them. The whole courthouse to choose from, they took this room, ugly, stained, and windows on the alley, glass panes dust-smeared as though never washed, and moldy smells seeping in from off the ground, and flies drifting round on the dank sultry air. Squire Colton was here—he had not expected this; and another lawyer whose name slipped his mind. They sat across from him, chairs uptilted, feet on the rungs; the marshall sat next to them; beyond the marshall, the committee clerk, elbows on the table while he sharpened his pens. The marshall chewed, eyes on the big spittoon. Two county Democrats, and not a single other colored man. Nine whites.

“Hill.” He looked at Watt. “This letter that you wrote the committee: Are all the facts here that you want to give?”

“Yes, sir. They are there.”

“The name of all those you thought you recognized?”

“Yes, sir. Their faces bein’ covered . . . but I’m sure of those I named.”

“How can you be sure!” Van Horn said.

“Can you add any names, Hill?” Watt said.

“No, sir, I can’t add more, though there were three or four others. . . . But other colored people they have come on can give names.”

“One case at a time,” Van Horn said.

“How long ago was it?—but I’ve got the date here.” Watt fumbled with his papers.

“Ten weeks ago last Friday. They came on me the night of May 26th.”

“Do you still bear the scars?”

“Yes, I bear them.”

“You were born a slave, Hill?”

“Yes, sir, though I never served.”

“You’ve always been a cripple?”

“No, sir. When a little boy, I had a sickness.”

“Born in South Carolina?”

“Here in Clay County. I’ve lived in the Carolina upcountry all my life. Not in Sand Hollow district, though I’ve lived in Sand Hollow about half the years since we went free.”

“How old are you?”

“I was born in 1834. I turned thirty-seven a few weeks ago.”

"You conduct a school for the children of your district?"

"Yes, sir, for nearly six years now. We opened it December 1865. And Anna Darrow helps me. She teaches the littler ones."

"You are also preacher there, I surmise?"

"I am, of the African Methodist Church."

"Hill—and please answer carefully—can you swear as to these names?"

"I am as sure as a man can be when men come disguised. There were ways of tellin'."

"You belonged to the so-called Union League, Hill?"

"You were head in your district? Held secret meetings?" Van Horn said.

Eli turned his gaze full on Van Horn.

"Am I not here . . .?" Though then he checked his speech.

The two county Democrats were staring at him. He turned his head away, and found that his mind only partially heard as the Congressmen argued as to who should question next.

"You know, don't you, Hill?"—Blake was speaking—"that I am a Republican? And Senator Watt is? And we want to stop all these outrages against the colored people here and elsewhere? You know we've got no sympathy with this Ku Klux Klan, and have put through a law to crush it out? And that is why we're here investigating? Or course this third gentleman you see is the minority member, a Democrat, Representative from Pennsylvania."

"This is an outrage," Van Horn said.

"Congressman Van Horn, I'm just making sure that this colored man knows who is who here, and where we each stand. Hill, you can go ahead and answer my question."

"Do I know, you ask me? Yes, I know. And I came here believin'—at least I had hope, because I have believed that the Republicans intended well by my race, that God had appointed them to help us to our rights, like all humans want——"

"That's all right, then," Blake broke in. And he nodded to Watt, and Watt turned to Van Horn.

"Later," Van Horn said.

"Very well." Watt picked up a paper. A vacant chair stood over to his right, in front of the marshall, and across the room from Eli. Watt glanced at the chair.

"Call Thomas Reese," he said.

The marshall rose and took his way out.

Thus it began. In the hours that followed, Eli by no means heard everything. His mind was in a curious state, though much of the time it felt unclouded; and he was fully aware, all his senses alert, his vision in particular seemingly acute, so that even minute details of the room stood out; and men's faces and features—and what lay behind them—were delineated unforgettably. At times, however, an odd thing happened; the room receded or felt far away; and men became like dim shapes moving, so obscure that they merged—he could not remember afterward which man had said certain things. This was not long-lasting. Something dimly heard, a quick turn of a head, a question put, would bring the place back abruptly into focus, so that men became clear, though as silhouettes are clear against a late evening sky: shadows, yet men he knew, so that he could recognize them, and feel no surprise at what they did—their words and tones came echoing to him distinctly, although still at a distance. When, as was usual, he was fully present, he was well aware of how close they were.

"Call Thomas Reese."

"You have been accused here," Watt said, "by this colored man, who says that you were in the Ku-Klux band that raided him. His brother's wife, Emmy Hill, has testified that she heard you talk from where she stood behind a door."

"And you gentlemen accept that kind of evidence? His brother's wife is mistaken, of course. Is there a Ku Klux Klan? I frankly don't know. The Negroes do a lot of talkin', but I've never seen it, nor do I know a single white man who has."

"Can you say where you were the night of May 26th?"

"That's a good while back, sir, though I happen to remember, just because I heard of this raid the next day—the town was indignant—a crippled man. Jack Temple and I were at Willie Higg's saloon awhile. Then I rode out to my grandfather's house."

"Others saw you at your grandfather's house, no doubt?"

"Yes, indeed, sir, several others. We were havin' a pleasant, sociable evenin'."

"Mr. Reese," Van Horn said. "Are white people afraid of Eli Hill's influence?"

"Afraid? Oh, no sir, not in the least. That don't mean that he hasn't been mighty foolish—teamin' up with the Radicals—if the gentlemen over there will pardon me," he cast a side glance at Watt and Blake.

"Call Dewberry Hodges."

"You live near this colored man?" Watt said.

"My farm's about a mile down the road."

"We understand that his brother's boy ran to ask your help?"

"I can't go traipsin' off every time a nigger claims that he's bein' molested."

"Had Eli Hill done things to offend white people?" Van Horn said.

"Mixin' up in that Union League. I told his brother he'd better make Eli quit that business."

"Don't you know who was in the Ku-Klux band that night?" Blake said.

"I don't even know if there is a Ku Klux. Get niggers scared, they'll make up anything."

"Call Roy Sommers."

"Can you tell us where you were that night?" Blake said.

"Make me quit my plowin' to ask me that! I could tell you, but I don't see that I'm obliged to."

"Eli Hill claims that he recognized you."

"There you go accusin' me o' something. You take a nigger's word against a white man's? It makes me danged riled. We've got no rights left."

"I warn you not to refuse to answer."

"If you must know, I was twenty miles away. Playin' cards with some chaps over in York County."

"And the names of the men?"

"I'll give them to my lawyer, nobody else."

"And if we say we know that you were one of the band? If we even know that you actually wielded——"

"Mister, I won't stay here to be threatened. I can prove in court where I was that night. I ain't a member of any Ku-Klux gang, what's more I don't have to be. I do my own thrashin' if my niggers need it. No band o' rowdies got to come on them for me."

"Call Dr. Campbell."

"Yes, sir, I've known Eli since he was little. Always been sickly. Doc Reuben Arnold has tended him some lately. But I've tended him the most, and I tended his ma——"

"Doctor," Van Horn said. "In the war, they tell me, you remained a Union man."

"Yes sir, been Union all my life. But I ain't a Republican. Don't catch me bein' bedfellows with any no-count slave trader, all these common riff-raff. I don't mind the darkies, I've owned them, always taken up for them, always will. But Ira Lilly—no sir."

"Doctor," Watt said. "Hill has named certain names——"

"Now, why would those danged fools come on a cripple? I told my daughter, 'Mamie,' I said, 'I'm not one for this Ku-Kluxin', or Regulators, or whatever fool name they call themselves.' Though like as not it's been exaggerated."

"What made white men down on Hill?" Van Horn said.

"They been holdin' secret meetings, carryin' arms, burnin', even——"

"Did Eli Hill do that?"

"Now, that was a mistake—a man like that Naegle, sayin', 'Lay waste in ashes.' Eli may have used inflammatory language. Some black preachers do—'We'll go with our race, right or wrong.'"

"Did Eli Hill say that?"

"And I've told them right to their faces, Eli knows it, 'You be satisfied. You've got your freedom, what more do you want?' I told him, 'I don't think you all are as smart as we are. But you've got your opportunity now. Don't get drunk on liberty.' I've told that black Elder, Peter Baldwin, and I told Eli, 'Don't let your people run wild here. Line up,' I told him, 'with the respectable white people. Vote their way.'"

"*Call June Sims.*"

"Sims," Van Horn said. "You testified yesterday that Eli Hill is your friend."

"Yes, sir, I been knowin' him right along since freedom came."

"You're a deacon in his church?"

"Yes, sir, I was for awhile."

"You said that you helped Hill get up that meeting with the white people."

"Yes, sir, we aimed to quiet things. Others wouldn't help him. Isaac Darrow wouldn't, nor old man Darrow, nor Tim Moore, nor Dan Martin—that was before. . . . And Luke Judson acted queer. And even Elder Baldwin didn't come around. So I drove Eli when we went to see people. Used my own mule and wagon."

"Has he changed since that meeting?"

"I don't know, sir, though he seemed to act some different."

"You were also raided?" Blake said.

"Yes, sir, the Ku Klux came on me too."

"Whipped you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did as they demanded?"

"I was scared not to. Yes, sir."

"And you went to Eli Hill after he was raided?" Van Horn said.

"I did, yes, sir."

"Begging him to do what you had done?"

"He's a crippled man. Folks wouldn't a-blamed him."

"Sims, was Eli Hill head of your Union League?"

"Why as to that, sir—do I have to answer?"

"No," Van Horn said. "It isn't necessary."

"*Call Major Rob Abel.*"

"Major," Watt said. "This colored man accuses certain men of being in the band attacking him——"

"Then, sir, why not arrest the men, have them bound over, and bring them to trial? That's the right and proper way."

"It is not so simple, Major."

"Yes, I know, and I sympathize with you. Our Negroes are fond of their tall tales, have little feuds amongst themselves——"

"Then you think, Major, that Hill was not raided?"

"I would like to think not—a dastardly thing, if so."

"You do not believe a Ku Klux Klan exists?" Blake said.

"I believe it does not. I know of no organization called 'Ku Klux Klan.' And I think I would have heard if there had been one."

"Major," Blake said. "Shortly after the Dan Martin raid, a so-called Ku-Klux Manifesto appeared in this town by night, posted in a public place. I show you a copy. Does this alter your opinion?"

"This paper certainly bears the initials. Somebody must have written it. We have some unruly elements in our county."

"You credit it to them?"

"Poor whites, sir, who resent the Negro's freedom as infringement of their status. Although as to these sentiments expressed here——"

"That 'intelligent honest white men (taxpayers)' intend to rule this county?"

"Gentlemen, an infamous revolution has been foisted upon us here!"

"Then you are saying in effect that you support the sentiments put down in this Ku-Klux Manifesto?"

"The sentiments I can approve. But not the violence. The method is terrible. No responsible, principled man could ever want to use it."

"Major, has your name ever been connected in public rumor with the Ku Klux Klan?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"You have never been a member—not a leading officer?"

"Sir, I resent your insinuations. My answer is, I know nothing of their proceedings."

"Yet it has been charged here by Eli Hill——"

"I have nothin' but contempt for such charges!"

"Major," Van Horn said. "You know Eli Hill well?"

"I ought to, sir. I once owned the man—or boy, he was then. His parents belonged to my stepfather, Squire Mark Hill. When Squire Hill died, I owned these people briefly."

"What would you say of Eli Hill's reputation?"

"He sustained a very good one for awhile. Seemingly a quiet, unassuming Negro, and in late years, one who went about preaching salvation of souls."

"He underwent a change?"

"I do not wish to be misunderstood."

"Say what you think, Major."

"I will say only this. I have lost my good opinion. I've not liked his behavior. I suspect him of being an embittered colored man, one who harbors fanatical race feelings. I have seen signs of it. I can no longer trust him."

"Call Willie Riggs."

"You were a Union man?" Watt said.

"And now a leading Republican?" Van Horn said.

"Don't know about the leadin'."

"Judge Temple came to you on one occasion about Eli Hill, I understand," Watt said.

"That was a long while back. Judge figured to get me to help him try to stop this Union League before it got far. Thought Eli Hill might be made to use his influence."

"You did not help?"

"Judge meant no harm, he was just agitated. Said blacks might win out, there bein' so many of them, if they went to votin' Republican. That was before the first Reconstruction election. Judge miscalculated. I told him it wouldn't be expedient for me—my side might lose if I went helpin' him out. No, I told him, I'd hoe my own row like I'd always done."

"A Ku-Klux member came to you by night lately?" Blake said.

"The chap claimed he was one. I sent him over to federal troop headquarters."

"He did not reveal to you who was in the party that raided Eli Hill?"

"Not to me, he didn't. Ask Colonel Ames."

"So you don't know of your own knowledge?"

"Well, Mister, I weren't there."

"Do you think Hill has named some right names?"

"I'd take his word quick as I would a white man's."

"Mr. Riggs," Van Horn said. "I believe you run a saloon in this town."

"That's right, I'm a barkeep here."

"And you run the Republican Party in this county?"

"You are Congressman Van Horn, ain't you, Mister?"

"Yes, I am."

"Democrat, ain't you?"

"I'm asking the questions here, Riggs."

"I aim to answer, though I fail to see what this has to do with Eli Hill bein' come on by Ku-Kluxers. Unless I mistake not, you're castin' reflections on what I do. I'm a peaceable man, Mister, but I don't like that. I conduct my business honest, I don't allow rowdiness, I go to church Sabbath Day. If I like politics, I figure that's my

business. If I mix in 'em, I've got the right. When it comes to others, black man or white man, I say he's got the same right as me, Eli Hill included. And though you ain't asked my opinion, I might say as to any bunch o' white men who are such lowdown cowards as to cover up their faces and go a-raidin' a crippled man to put down his politics. . . ."

"I've had enough, Riggs!"

"I've had my say, Mister."

"*Call General Reese.*" "Yes, sir, my grandson was at my house on the night in question." And "*Call Squire Colson*" (from the chair where he had sat throughout the proceedings). "Sol Hill's boy did come, yes. His loud yelling woke me from a sound sleep. I ran downstairs. . . . When I hastened up to dress, I looked at my clock, and just then heard a cock crow. It was nearly dawn, their farm was almost three miles distant—by road, that is—not by field path, the way the boy had run. I knew that it was too late—the band would have left. I went next day to try to reassure them. . . . No, I did not see Eli, they said he was too ill. It was a deplorable wicked deed. . . . Yes, I had gone to him in a kindly spirit urging the wisdom of a moderate course."

"*Call Judge John Temple.*"

"Judge," Van Horn said. "You are well acquainted with Eli Hill?"

"I have known him many years. I knew his people. His stepfather Zeke Hill was a very good Negro."

"Is Eli Hill's word to be relied upon?"

"I had always thought so. I had borne a good opinion——"

"But you bear it no longer?"

"I did not wish to say that. I would like to qualify—I have suffered disappointment."

"Judge," Watt said. "He claims that the Ku Klux raided him."

"He was certainly raided, though I don't know who did it."

"But you surely believe that a Ku Klux Klan exists?"

"Yes, something does, for there have been many raids, and that name keeps appearing."

"I am glad to hear that you recognize the fact, Judge."

"Because, Senator, I recognize other facts. Our people have suffered to the breaking point—Union Leagues—a Negro government—blacks armed, as they were last autumn, going about drilling—our

streets unsafe. . . . But why would you comprehend our desperate plight?"

"Judge," Blake said. "Are you then justifying——?"

"I am justifying nothing. I bitterly deplore this violence. I don't approve of vigilante bands, even when formed to act against bad characters."

"Is Eli Hill a bad character, Judge?" Blake said.

"I did not say that. In fact, our more sober-minded men are convinced that it was not the real Ku Klux Klan that attacked Eli Hill, but a spurious band not under its orders, that usurped the Klan robes, to carry out a private vengeance, low elements."

"He has named prominent men, Judge. He says the raiders told him it was his politics."

"I know nothing of that. His treatment was a terrible deed, a blot on our county. When I was told, it filled me with horror."

"Then," Blake said, "if your son had been there, you would not have approved?"

"That goes without saying, sir. But my son. . . ."

"Judge, your son left the state quite suddenly, I hear."

"No——"

"It is claimed that he too was there——"

"If you are accusing my son. . . . My son's honor is above reproach, sir. No, he did not leave suddenly. It had long been planned that he would go read law with his uncle in Richmond."

"And the date that he left had long been set?"

"Not the precise date. It was a matter of his pleasure. He decided that the time had come to go."

"Judge," Van Horn said. "Tell me, why do you consider Eli Hill a dangerous man?"

"I am sure that I did not use that term, sir. True, I have been disturbed. . . . Dangerous? If you mean to proper peace and order, to normal relations between the races, to restoration of the former good will——though, no, I cannot go so far."

"*Call Colonel Ames.*"

"Yes, sir, I was ordered here after the Dan Martin raid. My company followed shortly. . . . Yes, I investigated, I have for you the list of those who claim that the Ku Klux raided them. . . . No, sir, Eli Hill's case is not proved as to those who attacked him. One man, in

remorse, seemed about to confess—he left town suddenly, so that that hope was blasted. And the former Ku-Klux member—we had him—somebody helped him get away. Unless we can find him, I tell you bluntly, gentlemen, the case will collapse. I told Hill’s people so, I have told Hill himself.”

Eli waited, though not looking toward the door, since he knew that it would open once he heard Watt speak; he could almost wish it would, to bring the slight relieving draught that would stir the air in the oppressive room. This time, however, the door remained closed. Colonel Ames did not leave, the marshall did not move.

“That is all, then?” Watt asked.

“I wish to question Eli Hill,” Van Horn said.

He glanced at Eli, though he turned away again, and began to sort his papers and lay aside a few. Eli found his eyes, as if compelled to do it, following every movement of those large deliberate hands.

“Hill.” Van Horn looked at him directly. “You’ve come here asking justice. A man who does that has got to come with clean hands. Some serious things have been alleged here about you. I think the time has come to get matters straight.”

“I have told the truth,” Eli said.

“You have never once admitted that you led the Union League, and by your secret meetings made white men insecure, arousing their suspicions that you stirred up hatred, race for race, incited your people.”

“Yes, I heard them here.”

“And you were urged to compromise, to use your influence against extremism, and for moderation.”

“I know what I did.”

“Urged by leading white men here who tried to warn you, men who had your race’s interests at heart. Violence was committed against your person, I am persuaded that this happened to you. But at whose hands? You’ve sown the wind, Hill, arousing the wild irresponsible white elements—you have reaped a whirlwind.”

“Is Major Rob Abel——?”

“And now you’ve crowned your tragic influence by coming here accusing respected men, outstanding white citizens in this county. You can prove nothing, yet are ready to bring on them humiliation, dishonor, even prison terms.”

"I know what I saw."

"You know! Answer me, Hill. If you were being mistreated the way you have claimed: dragged from your house, slapped, kicked, questioned, called upon to recant, yes, and whipped—beaten with a brutal lash—if indeed all this was happening to you—I ask, in the name of high heaven, could you have made out who did the deeds? Recognized voices? Known mannerisms? Seen a scarred hand? Identified a man because forsooth he was drunk? When you admit that they were all covered, heads and bodies? They could have been black men, for all you know. You say there was no moon, that the night was like pitch——"

"They made a light—they brought out my lamp! Can nobody tell me? What are white men made of that they can do what they do?"

"Now we have the notions running round in his brain—a mighty active brain for a colored man."

Blake jerked up his head as though impelled to speak. Staring at Van Horn, he dropped his eyes again.

"Answer me this, Hill," Van Horn said. "Why are you here? What is it made you take this step? You say that your people have been so intimidated that they've been sleeping in the woods for fear of violence. Aren't you frightened too, if whites are as you claim? Aren't you afraid to come here and accuse them of these things? Aren't you fearful of reprisals on yourself? What makes you so bold? I'd like to know the reason."

Eli's gaze dwelt on Van Horn's face; it was like a pallid blur in the room's dimming light. And he looked at Watt and Blake, though their eyes were on the table, and at all the white faces he saw around the room. He felt that curious sense that can overtake a man, as of something familiar in the place he finds himself, while he knows that where he is he has not been before. He spoke, his face turned toward the committee.

"No matter what I answered, would you believe it? If I said I was obliged to come, would you know what I meant? If I said that I'd rather be come on again than not to have come here, would you not twist my meanin', make it out something bad? What words can I say here? Will I speak of makin' peace? And I want peace with whites. I've got to have it with myself. I don't doubt you're thinkin', When will he begin to answer? But am I obligated to try to explain? Am I

the one who stands accused here?" He said, speaking to Van Horn, "I find that I ain't able to tell you what you asked."

Blake sat staring at his hands on the table, while the clerk's pen scratched till all the words were down. Only then did Van Horn give a slight shrug and lean back in his chair. With that the room stirred, and Watt cleared his throat and spoke to the marshal.

"You can go fetch the man who carried him in."

Chairs began to scrape, and men to rise and stretch, and a hubbub of voices to fill the emptying room. Voices and footsteps resounded in the corridor; the sounds grew fainter till the whole place was still. Eli waited, staring through the open window on the dingy alleyway that was deeply shadowed now, when he felt Tim's hand drop on his shoulder, and heard him say, "Wagon's waitin', Eli."

6

Ransomed



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Three days had passed since the hearing in Clayville. The hour was dawn, not fully light. Looking from his doorway, Eli listened and let the cool sweet air bathe his face. The birds had started up their chirping, the sky stretched pale and clear. King's Mountain rose over yonder, blue and dim in the dawn, pines in the woods across the road showed dark and strong against the sky, good fields stretched away, well-prepared for this time when they must ripen and mature the crops.

But having looked, he turned away and with his prize-stick worked himself across the floor. From the wide shelf above his bed he took a little book from its place, the book in which the record lay of those who had been going to Liberia. Eli did not open the book, but now made his way over to his chest. The key to his chest was in his hand, the big iron key of which Sol was so proud, his having been the handiwork. Opening the lid, Eli lifted out some clothing, and then a little bundle that he kept there tied up in a large handkerchief that had been his mother's long ago.

With care Eli untied the knots—the ends were badly twisted and worn—laying open what was there. The child's schoolbook that he had first learned from back in the old slave days. A pin that his mother used to wear. Their freedom papers. And the other paper saying fifty dollars owed "for the crippled boy, Eli," and "ten dollars for a set of carpenter's tools," and bearing Zeke's name and mark, and signed, "Rob't Abel" and "Paid in full." Also his first notebook of school accounts, full to its last page, and a few odds and ends. Having laid aside each with careful hands, Eli spread out the kerchief on the chest.

The little book in which were written the Liberia names lay beside him on the floor. Eli held it in his hands a passing moment, then laid it in the kerchief and returned the other keepsakes. Tying tight the knots, he replaced the bundle in the bottom of the chest, turned the big key, and put the key away in its accustomed place.

In the course of that day Eli broke the news. It spread quickly. People took it up and passed it along. However, so many rumors circulated, most of them bad in these days, that good ones had come to be hard to believe. In succeeding days people had to come themselves and put their question. "Preacher, is it so? You ain't goin'?" "It's so," Eli told them. "I'm stayin' here. I'm not goin' to Liberia." Having been reassured, they went their way.

At the same time it was almost as if after relief, dejection overtook him. Eli puzzled about this a little, though after awhile he believed he understood. While he was still going the old dream lived. It made it real, it existed somewhere, the place was there that they had heard about, one man at least would reach the Promised Land. Now it seemed to fade. They were here, he was going to stay, all they could see was just today, and maybe tomorrow, but not beyond, and what did today and tomorrow hold but what they been knowing in past days, and in past nights?

Only the children took it otherwise. His schoolchildren began also to come, sometimes by twos and threes from a family. Their bare feet caked with road dust, they would drift into the yard and wait until Eli discovered them. He would call out, "Howdy." Then they would ask, "Teacher, is it so?" "Yes, it's so." "We'll have school openin', same as usual?" "Just the same." They would leave satisfied.

But now Eli himself began to send for various people. He called in Luke, to say that they would start up prayer meeting once more, Wednesday nights as in the former time; a few would come at first, and presently more. He saw the next Wednesday as time to begin, and asked Luke to pass the word along. He spoke to Simon Darrow. Would the old man spare them a little more cleared land around the school? He had thought of making a patch of cotton, let the children work it, and sell the few pounds; they stood in great need of more schoolbooks. He spoke to Anna of several matters, in particular of the lessons that they had once held for men who wished to read and write; these had stopped abruptly when the raids began. Eli asked Anna to get the word around that the lessons would be starting again in the slack time after laying-by.

On one matter he spoke to several men, but to Sol first, and then to Isaac Darrow, since they were the carpenters and landowners.

He wanted greatly to enlarge the school. It was far too small for their needs, either as a schoolhouse or church on the Sabbath. If need be, let them build the new walls with logs taken from Sol's and Darrow's woods. And let every man and boy who was able use his muscle to work—haul, saw, lift, hammer—provided the carpenters did the parts requiring skill. It would do people good, Eli told Sol, to know they were building on the schoolhouse again. Indeed, when word of the building got around, while some were skeptical, others offered to help. Eli it is true felt disappointment, but continued to push, telling himself, when the work begins they will take hold.

Crops were laid by in the hot August days, and while bolls matured and corn grew ripe, Sand Hollow awoke to fresh exertion. Prayer meeting was held once more on Wednesday nights. A handful of men gathered Saturday afternoons to pick up the lessons they had hastily dropped. Now hammers could be heard in the schoolhouse grove, and saws at work. Teams came and went. People came to watch. They had now begun to call it "Zion School."

No doubt some of this dwelt in Eli's mind as on an August day he returned from the school, where he had watched new beams being swung into place. The heat was intense so he sat within his cabin in the dim coolness between his two doors. Young Jim sat on the floor beside him, a pail of wild berries in his lap.

Lazily Jim picked trash from the berries, basking in release from hard field chores. They spoke a few words of Ben Strong's school and what Jim would study when September came. Once Jim let his hands lie idle and sat a moment, not as though disturbed, but more as if a thought had just occurred and he was musing on it.

Presently he asked, "When are you all goin' to start up the Union League again?"

Eli looked down at Jim, who once more was picking trash from his berries.

"The Union League, Jim?"

"The League was for good, wasn't it, Uncle Eli? We had the right, didn't we?"

"That's so, Jim."

"It makes me mad, whites tryin' to stop us. Why don't we have it anyhow?"

"That's right, Jim. Why? Take your berries to your ma, son. I've got some work to do. And will you run those chickens out from under my house? Their scratchin' and cluckin' bothers me."

Eli let several days go by. In this time he kept to himself, doing only those duties that could not be postponed. He was not morose, not even irritable, but more like a man who is deeply absorbed.

One day young Jim went bearing a message. It called for a few of the men to come, those in whom Eli placed special reliance. On the appointed evening, Tim arrived well ahead of the others.

"What's on your mind, Eli? Anna told me to come."

Down at the branch frogs had begun their evening chant.

"It's the Union League, Tim."

"To start it up again?"

"Yes, to start it up again."

"Eli, you sure you know what you're sayin'?"

"Tim, I ought to know."

"They'll blame you for it."

"You too, Tim."

"Yes, but you went to that committee hearin'. They heard what you said there. You're not forgettin' that?"

"No, I don't forget. Tim, I figure there are lots of good things the League could do, not just for the votin', though it has to do that. It could help men to improve themselves too. More could be learnin' to read and write, it can push that and other things."

"Eli, you've got to see. Times ain't like back in '68. We're bein' pushed back. Look at the Ku-Kluxin'."

"As though I haven't looked at that, Tim."

"It ain't worth the risk to you and everybody. The League don't take a stand on things."

"And say it won't budge, if it comes to that."

"It'll come to that, Eli."

"Tim, listen. I know I'm more a quiet man than you are likin' my books—you do too—but I lean on them. I like my teachin'. And I like preachin', I will again by and by when I've figured out better what my message is—I don't know for certain yet. And I'd like doin' these things in peace. I'm not a warlike man, I know it."

"We'd all like peace," Tim said. "To live in peace, do our work."

"But, Tim, you ain't forgotten, they came on me."

"I don't forget, Eli."

"They laid hands on me, they used the lash. It was bad. It would be next time. But something else happened. I can stand it now."

"I know it, Eli. We all know it."

"I'm not scared of whites anymore. I don't have to search and wonder what they'll think, had we better do this or that needed thing for fear of them. That old burden has rolled off my back. Whites themselves took it off, whipped it off, if you want to say that. I'm free now, Tim. They may steal my body, they can't touch me."

"You ought to know, Eli."

"That means I'm able now to think what I know, and to tell them what I think. Whites have got to learn that we're no different from them; they've got to treat us like equal men are treated. I don't know when they'll learn it, but they've got to someday. . . . I think we need the League. I'd like to see us have it."

"If that's how it is, then all right, Eli."

The two sat in silence for awhile. It grew darker, night fell, and they heard the low voices of the other men coming toward them along the pasture path.

Cotton picking had begun that September day, 1871, the first light picking that was always quickly finished, so that Sol could spare his wagon. Eli was riding home from Zion School. Work on the building was at rest most days, but he felt the need to go and see. The new walls stood, and with the old sidewall pulled out, it showed the floor space as it was going to be, and he was no doubt arranging the place in his head. Emmy drove him. There he sat in the old chair that all these years had been kept fastened to the wagon seat for him. He was deeply engrossed, speaking little, sitting there, his shawl pulled tight around his shoulders against the keenness of a sudden evening breeze, while the mule kept up his slow walk down the road toward the bend.

Eli murmured something, Emmy thought he did, but the wind had begun to whistle a little in the pine woods they were passing; that might have been the sound she heard. Clouds had picked up, spreading as milk spreads when it spills, except that these clouds

became dark and heavy. Although it was hardly five o'clock the day seemed well advanced.

They had almost reached the bend when Emmy heard a noise in the pine woods, a crash as of someone stumbling and falling. She looked quickly—however, underbrush was heavy, and shadows were deep. It passed through her mind that hunters must be out, for she noticed the glint of a gun, and noticed what she took to be two white men, one of them a big bull-like man, so that even his name flashed through her mind—she had reason to notice him; although, as she said afterward, seeing them was gone from her mind before the wagon had reached the bend.

They were making the turn when Emmy heard a shot. It seemed close, the mule even gave a start. Then she felt Eli lean in a heavy way against her shoulder. She looked around sharply.

“Eli!”

She saw a little hole in the shawl, saw blood spreading at its edges.

Emmy whipped up the mule and her breath came in sobs. The wagon bumped and rattled down the road. They turned the bend and she was screaming Sol's name—he ran around the house as they pulled up in the yard. They got Eli down and onto his bed.

He still lived, that they could tell, though he gave no sign, just lay unconscious there. Emmy brought strips of linen from an old petticoat, and Sol bound up the wound in Eli's chest. But then he had to go. Tearing off the mule's harness he galloped down the road, headed toward Clayville.

Luke Judson lived two miles further on. Sol stopped long enough to tell Luke to go—get Tim Moore, and ask Anna to hasten to Emmy's help. He galloped on, or galloped when he could. The sand was heavy, the hills long, the boggy places hard to make haste through.

Never had a ride anywhere anytime seemed so bitter and so long. It was nearly midnight when Sol at last reached town. Old Doctor Campbell grumbled and fussed, an aged man, and wakened in the night, and hating mightily to go so far. “I'm sick and tired,” he said, “of men huntin' near the roads. Just last week a white man nearly died from a stray bullet.” Sol begged and pleaded and went himself to saddle the old doctor's mare. Then he rode straight to Baldwin's house to get his help for what he must do.

Luckily Baldwin was at home. They saddled his horse and were on their way, not even stopping by Ben Strong's school but leaving word with Baldwin's wife for Jim to come. They rode directly to troop headquarters. Only a sergeant was in charge. Colonel Ames was in Columbia, Captain Frick with him, on Ku-Klux cases. And just that afternoon Lieutenant Dawson had been called on reports of a clash a good many miles away. Sol told the sergeant why he came. Sergeant Flynn said flatly he was helpless to act. Perhaps Sol might go and tell the Sheriff. When Colonel Ames returned they could talk to him. Sol pleaded with the sergeant that proof would be gone. The sergeant shook his head, he was helpless to act.

Precious moments were spent pounding on the Sheriff's door. At last he appeared, bleary-eyed and short of temper.

Standing on the ground beneath the Sheriff's porch, Sol told his story.

"Are you all crazy?" Sheriff Dunn said. "Can I help it if hunters get careless? What right have you got to wake me up this way?"

"We believe my brother was shot a-purpose, Sheriff."

"So that's it! Foolishness. Was anybody seen? Have you got any reason to say such a thing?"

"My wife saw them. One of them she's sure was Roy Sommers. White men have been down on my brother. Everybody knows the Ku Klux came on him, and knows that Roy Sommers wielded the whip. They're still down on him. Now they've got him."

"There's been no Ku-Kluxin' all summer long," the Sheriff said. "They've quit that business."

"Go look around, Sheriff," Baldwin said. "Go out there while there's still proof. Investigate, do that much."

"No sense to it," the Sheriff said. "This is some more of you all's wild stories, accusin' white men when you've got no proof. I for one am sick and tired of it. Your wife like as not just imagined things. You're askin' me to waste my time, taxpayers' money, go on a wild goose chase."

"We're sayin' it was attempted murder, Sheriff," Baldwin said.

"I don't believe it. Anyhow, why come to me when you've got your Yankee troops at your beck and call?"

"The officers are away," Sol said.

"So that's how it is!" Sheriff Dunn's resentment rose, broke into fury. "Now you think you'll come around a-beggin' my help. I get so consarned mad with you blacks. Don't you know you can't have it both ways? You turn against the white man and then come a-beggin'. You've made your bed, now you've got to lie in it. I'm a fair man. I was even thinkin' maybe I ought to go out yonder about your crazy tale. Now I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. Have your Yankee Colonel kick me around, maybe even tell me I'd been up to monkey-shines, maybe hidin' the evidence to protect a white man? No sirree. You wanted your Yankees, by God, you can have 'em!" The Sheriff stalked into his house and slammed the door.

The sun was rising like a ball in the east when Sol with Peter Baldwin rode into Eli's yard. The old doctor's horse was hitched to a tree and a clump of men squatted by a little fire. Several came forward to take the beasts. The Elder and Sol slipped into the room where the blinds were closed and lamps still burned. Eli lay as still as when Sol had left. He had said no word or made hardly any sound, except that his hard breathing could be heard. Emmy and Tim waited off to one side. Anna stood at the bedside helping the doctor.

As the day moved on, those who came to inquire remained to wait. By early afternoon a good many had gathered, the men in the yard in their several little clumps, and the children, standing aimlessly about, while the womenfolk with their little ones stayed within Sol's house doing nothing. Now and then Sol or Tim came outside; then the women would come slipping from Sol's cabin, whispering, "Tell us, tell us." It was all very quiet for so tenanted a place.

At around three o'clock Ben Strong drove in, bringing young Jim. Emmy came and took the boy to her house, but soon she was back again in Eli's place.

Soon after this the old doctor left. Silently men unhitched his horse and helped the old man mount and watched him ride away.

Presently Tim Moore appeared. Women and men pressed close to him.

"Tim," somebody said.

"Sh—h," came from the crowd.

"He can't hear," Tim said.

"Don't know nothin'?" a man said softly.

"Not since the shot, so it don't hurt."
 "I'm glad it don't hurt him," a woman said.
 "Tim, will he *die*?" It was another woman.
 "The doctor says so," Tim said.
 After a pause a voice said, "Tim!"
 "Hush! Sh—h," came the murmur.
 "It's all right," Tim said again.
 "Tim, who'll be our preacher, then?"
 "The Elder will come hold preachin' sometimes."
 "None o' our own?" a woman asked.
 "He'll find us somebody somehow. I know he will."
 "Tim," a man asked. "Can we get another teacher like him?"
 "Can we?" several voices said.
 "Tim," a man said. "I've got seven children needin' their schoolin'.
 We've had that school since freedom came, he's been our teacher."
 "We'll get another teacher," Tim said.
 "Tim," a woman said. "We ain't finished our new buildin'"
 "We're goin' to finish it! . . . I reckon I better go back now."



Eli died a while before the dawn. His burial was set for late the following day since warm September days made haste necessary. Sol and Isaac Darrow had to labor all night to prepare the coffin. And, although his shriveled legs did not require it, they made the full-length coffin of a man, it did not occur to them to do otherwise.

They had first thought to lay him away beside his mother on the gentle slope that rose behind Sol's barn. Instead, by some kind of common accord, they dug his grave in the tall-pine clearing where he had often held preaching on clear, pleasant days. The school-house was hardly more than fifty yards away. On Sunday the voices of the people raised in song would easily carry to the grave in the clearing; and on weekdays it would be the sing-song cadence of the children at their lessons.

It was mid-September and an overclouded day. Rain might come and wet the precious fleece hanging ready in the bolls. No manner of persuasion could have held people to their work that Friday. In Sand Hollow district and in more distant places fields were deserted as if it were the Sabbath, and the paths and roadways

crisscrossing the country saw them on their way before the day was well advanced.

The procession formed around four o'clock. Six men bore the coffin down Eli's steps, the crowd swaying back to give them room. When the men had placed the coffin on Sol's wagon, Tim Moore came forward and took the reins, not mounting to the seat, but remaining alongside. He shook the reins gently and clucked to the mule. With a squeak of wheels the wagon slowly turned, though before Tim could speak his soft "Haw," the mule had turned left and headed up the road, so familiar was the route that he traveled today.

The Elder took his place ahead of the body, walking bareheaded, Bible in his hand, and began to lead the journey. Just behind the wagon Eli's own folks walked, and a little space behind them, those who knew him best with the Darrows at their head. Back of these chief mourners the throng fell in. The wagon took its creaking way through the heavy ruts and turned the bend, and still they came, a long uneven line stretching far back, every age and condition, from the old and bent to babies being carried.

There was something reminiscent about the long procession—there might have been if Eli could have seen—of a boyhood dream he used to have in the former time before freedom came. A great dark throng moving up a high road, the Elder at the head, and a Promised Land. And sure enough, when the Elder preached his sermon standing beside where Eli lay, he raised up the image of those children of Israel, pointing a finger at the filled-in grave.

"The Lord called this man too, 'Preacher, tell old Pharaoh. . . ? Moses never saw the Land of Promise. . . . The children of Israel were caught in the wilderness, a waste-howlin' place—did they quit a-movin'? No, Lord! They buried Moses. Then they girded up their loins and kept on their way."